

Belgian Review

# The novel to-day





# The contemporary novel in Belgium

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# THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL IN DUTCH

This brief survey of the Belgian contemporary novel in Dutch starts roughly at the time when the 1939-1945 war was drawing to a close. No particular significance should be read into this date, which has been chosen simply as a convenient starting point for this chronology of literary history. It would of course be a mistake to claim that the war did not affect the course of Flemish literature. But neither force of arms nor enemy occupation caused any serious discontinuity in its development, and it would be difficult to divide it into different artistic periods.

This may be due to the fact that the German occupation coincided with the physical and spiritual maturity of the generation that had come up between the two wars. To some extent, the generation of writers producing work during the forties was a generation apart. For while they harboured memories of a period of relative peace between two conflicts; their intellect had also registered the anguish born of the crisis that lasted from 1939 to 1945. Therefore, contemporary Flemish literature may be said to start with the emergence of the writers born between 1910 and 1920. Even if their work does not bear any direct trace of the war, the fact remains that as a generation their formative years were influenced by a series of dreadful events: the economic crisis in 1929, the rise of nazism, the Spanish civil war, the war in Abyssinia, culminating in the frightful holocaust that engulfed the world.





Stijn Streuvels

But on the other hand it would be wrong to suggest that the Flemish novel of or about 1945 was born in a vacuum. Older writers who had already begun to publish before 1940 continued their work during the occupation, many of them attaining the full flowering of their creative genius after the year 1945. They had reached the age of maturity and seemed to illustrate the « natural law of literature » whereby middle age is the novelist's most fertile period, for that is when he combines technical proficiency with a rich fund of human experience.

The reader will appreciate therefore that it is extremely difficult to map out a precise chronological structure for the history of the Flemish contemporary novel. This is due also to the fact that even now, the influence of the great literary revival of the 1890's is still being felt in Flanders. This revival was the work of a group of writers gravitating around the review « Van Nu en Straks » (Of today and tomorrow) founded in 1893.

\* \* \*

It cannot be denied that the great period of STIJN STREUVELS (1871-1969) is long since past. But for a long time he survived as a living inspiration to the younger generations. And although these generations are perhaps out of sympathy with the verbal abundance of his impressionistic peasant novels, which are reminiscent of Russian and Scandinavian literature, they also show growing appreciation of his striking descriptions of the rural proletariat as it was fifty years ago. Some years ago Streuvels showed that he had not lost any of his artistry by publishing a vivid work entitled "De Familie Gezelle" (The Gezelle family), inspired by his family connection with the religious poet of nature, his uncle Guido Gezelle. In this fascinating documentary book Streuvels comes to grips with a number of complexes from which he suffered in his youth. So it may be that, in this

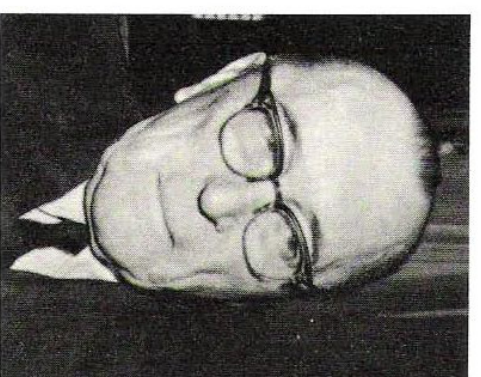


book which is also autobiographical, he voices the melancholy sentiment of a man of genius anxious to know how far this literary and philosophical fulfillment has been hampered by the narrow mentality and intellectual ethics of the class into which he was born...

It is a sad fact that in the past a good many writers may have suffered from this state of affairs in Flanders. But not at all events HERMAN TEIRLINCK (1879-1967), who could hardly be rated as one of the repressed! In 1946 he became the director of the review "Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift" (New Flemish Review) which is humanistic in spirit and for which he recruited a team of young writers.

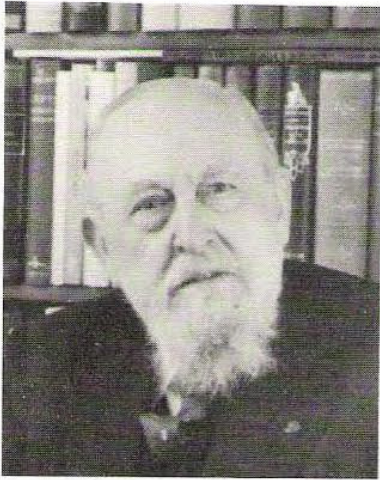
The versatile Teirlinck, known as the « Proteus of Flemish Literature », renowned both as a novelist, a playwright and a renovator of the arts and the theatre, was already one of the leading figures in the country when the post-war years brought him new literary fame. During the occupation "Maria Speermaile", his novel about a passionate chatelaine from the rolling countryside in southern Flanders, had been a sensational come-back followed by the demoniac eroticism of "Rolande met de Bles" (Rolande with the forelock).

His next work was "Het Gevecht met de Engel" (The battle with the angel), an epic about the Forest of Soignes extending over several generations. Imbued with Rubens-like exuberance, the explosive power of this potent book is counterbalanced by penetrating psychological observation akin to that of the finest English novels, combined at the same time with the insight afforded by modern psychoanalysis. But perhaps Teirlinck's most significant work is the ruthless "Zelfportret of het Galgemaal" (Self-portrait or the convict's last meal) in which he dissects the sombre enigma of his soul with pitiless lucidity...



Herman Teirlinck





Lode Baekelmans

EMMANUEL DE BOM (1868-1953) was another disciple of "Van Nu en Straks" who re-emerged after the war. In his novel about Antwerp "Het Land van Hambeloke" (The Land of Hambeloke), he went in search of bygone days, producing a "remembrance of things past", an old-fashioned anachronistic work which only interested readers in 1950 for anecdotal or historical reasons.

LODE BAEKELMANS (1879-1965), who did not belong to the "Van Nu en Straks" group, always kept to the fresh, simple style of his uncomplicated novels, set mostly among the upper and lower middle class in the port of Antwerp. "Robinson", "Carabas" and "De Nuchtere Minnaar" (The lucid lover) are very far removed from the agonizing problems facing people since the war but they survive thanks to the absence of any spurious artifice, the author's generous acceptance of life and his complete lack of pretentiousness.

\* \* \*

The post-war period brought recognition to a number of writers who had not yet achieved the success they deserved before 1940 or whose work only acquired its definite character at that time. It would be impossible in this brief survey to examine the deep psychological motives for the tardy or merely delayed development of these novelists' talent. But it would not be unreasonable to assume that some of them were impeded by the sense of oppression and anxiety prevalent during the years before the war. Others were probably absorbed entirely by the daily struggle for subsistence, a struggle which alas is rarely conducive to literary productivity when the number of readers is so small...

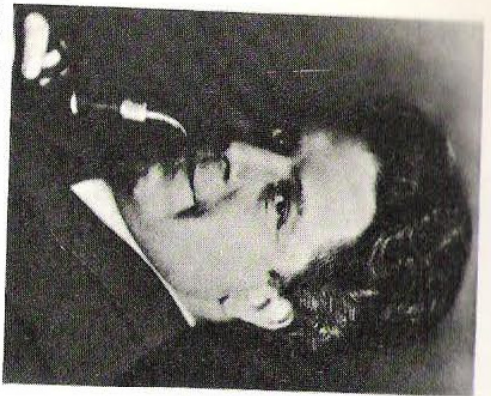
After the second world war, WILLEM ELSSCHOT (1882-1960) only published one tale, which appeared under the title "Het Dwaallicht" (The

The atmosphere of Antwerp  
and the call of the sea have  
inspired many Flemish writers









Felix Timmermans

will-o'-the-wisp). His work had always shown cool detachment, wit and a savage brand of humour, but in this latter-day book, a tale of the occupation period, Elsschot, who had never had any philosophical pretensions, depicts the very depths of human solitude and the vanity of life. It is a simple story of three Indian sailors vainly combing the harbour district of Antwerp for a girl who has made fools of them by fixing an imaginary appointment with them. But at the same time, it should be borne in mind that a writer's greatness derives also from the density of the atmosphere which permeates his earlier work. In the case of Willem Elsschot, a publicity broker who did not gain recognition until late in life, this density was very great, lending unity to several remarkable works in which, with a sometimes cynical humor but fundamental compassion, he observed in close detail the existential « being » of the lower middle class of today.

FELIX TIMMERMANS (1880-1947) has gained a European reputation and a permanent place in the history of Flemish contemporary literature. His historical novel about the painter "Adriaen Brouwer" appeared posthumously. Timmermans, who had undoubted genius, had already tackled the life and work of "Pieter Bruegel". Indirectly, his analysis of that Villon-like, often contradictory character of Brouwer was a means of probing his own nature. The tragic tones he elicited in this way did much to dispel the image created by his earlier work, of Felix Timmermans as a gay, superficial, wholly Pallieter-like character (Pallieter, the hero of the best known of his pre-war novels, symbolises the sensual pleasure of life).

Such a thorough reappraisal is obviously less necessary in the case of ERNEST CLAES (1885-1968). Even so, we feel that Flanders should relinquish the excessively rigid distinction it draws between "great literature" and "more popular literature", owing mainly to an artistic inferiority complex.



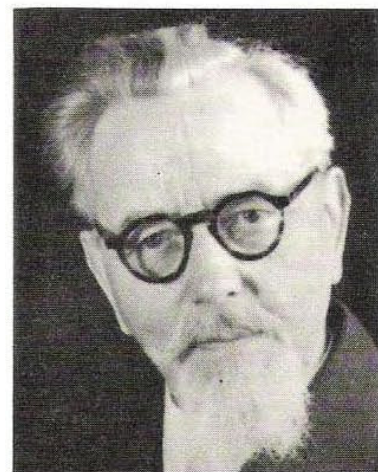
Foreign readers faced with a translation of "Er is een mens verdronken" (A man was drowned) would not dream of classifying it as a light work, and they would be quicker than we are to hail "Floere, het Fluwijn" (Velvet, the ferret) as one of the finest animal tales in modern world literature.

Literary stature must also be gauged by the quality of the books intended for average, less demanding readers. In this context it would be a snobbish and unfair not to mention a writer such as EMIEL VAN HEMELDONCK (1897). "De Cleyne Keyser" (The little emperor). "De Groene Swaen" (The green swan), "Soet Antwerpen Adieu" (Adieu sweet Antwerp), "Schelde Snelle Vliet" (The fast river Scheldt) and "Voghelen-sanck" (Birdsong) belong to the best kind of popular novel. Nor are they devoid of poetic purity, despite their excessive claim to virtue and unduly paedagogic ambitions.

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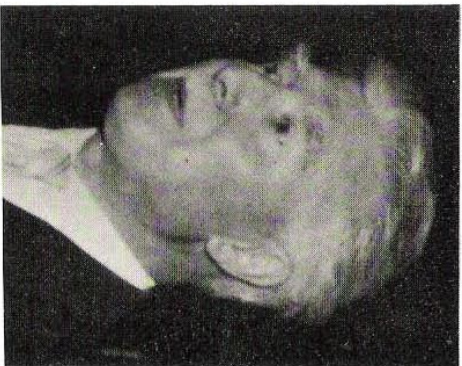
The work of RAYMOND BRULEZ (1895) was one of the revelations of the post-war period. Under the general title "Mijn Woningen" (My homes), this strongly French-oriented writer has written a kind of autobiographical novel in four volumes, "Het Huis te Borgen" (The house at Borgen), "Het Pakt der Triumviren" (The pact of the Triumvirs), "De Haven" (The harbour) and "Het Mirakel der Rozen" (The miracle of the roses).

Without intending any irony, it may be said that this tetralogy (in his youth, the author was an ardent Wagnerian) was in part the result of the author finding himself. He transformed what might have been a commonplace tale about the son of a well-to-do hotel proprietor at a Belgian seaside resort who becomes a novelist and a leading executive at the broadcasting



Ernest Claes





Emiel Van Hemeldonck

station, into a keenly intelligent and tautly written "remembrance of things past". In "Mijn Woningen" (My homes) we are taken from a soundly intellectual and effective description of a lower middle class family at the turn of the century to the battlefields and upheavals engendered by two world wars, from the discovery of politics to erotic experience, in a manner that is often reminiscent of the keen eye and robust tastes of the French 18th century.

Brulez's novel "De Verschijning te Kallista" (The apparition at Kallista) conveys us to a classical Greece that is amazingly close to our own world and which the author uses as a deliberately anachronistic pretext to explore the depths he discovers in religious crises and in sexual problems, particularly those resulting from incestuous love.

Brulez and the other authors mentioned here for the tardy flowering of their genius all displayed an astounding artistic development, which they attained thanks to the slow and regular maturing of their personality.

Circumstances were different for MARNIX GIJSEN (1899) who in the twenties was famous as an expressionist poet. When in 1947, after a long stay in the United States as a diplomat he published his novel "Het Boek van Joachim van Babylon" (The book of Joachim of Babylon), it was a revelation for those who had not been able to follow his gradual philosophical evolution. Literary history will no doubt analyse the causes and circumstances of this spiritual and emotional evolution. But at all events, readers of "Het Boek van Joachim van Babylon" came to know an entirely different Marnix Gijzen. Like Brulez's "Verschijning te Kallista" it is a deliberately anachronistic tale, formally inspired by the episode of the chaste Susannah as told by the Apocrypha, but rendered through the eyes of her husband Joachim. With Canaan and Babylon assuming the

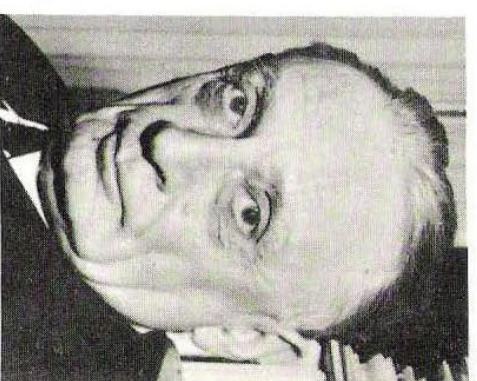


ings of Flanders and New York, the book's dominant themes are: farewell to the world of childhood and its seemingly unalterable values, the failure of Joachim and Susannah's marriage of convenience which was rendered inhuman by thirst for perfection and, lastly, to offset the disappointments of life, the edification of a relativist and stoical concept of human existence.

Not unreasonably many people thought that with the appearance of this sublime major work, Gijzen had freed himself of the problems that oppressed him and that he would now retire into solitude for ever more. But, happily for Flemish literature, this was not so. Having recognised his talent as a novelist and the purifying effect of literary creation, mellowed also by his rejection of former prejudice, he began from that moment to publish one novel after another.

These fall into an American and a Flemish cycle. "Goed en Kwaad" (Good and evil), "De Vleespotten van Egypte" (The fleshpots of Egypt), "De Kat in de Boom" (The cat in the tree), "Er gebeurt nooit iets" (Nothing ever happens) "Lucinda en de Lotusetter" (Lucinda and the Lotus eater) and "Harmagedon" (Armageddon) are American in inspiration, whereas the "Telemachus in het Dorp" (Telemachus in the village), "De Man van Overmorgen" (The man of the future), "Klaaglied om Agnes" (Elegy for Agnes), "De Lange Nacht" (The long night), "De Oudste Zoon" (The eldest son) and "Terwille van Leentje" (Because of Leentje) bear the imprint of his childhood and adolescence in Antwerp. Lastly, several collections of short stories come under the two headings: "Mijn Vriend de Moordenaar" (My friend the murderer), "De Diaspora" (The Diaspora), "Allengs gelijk de Spin" (Slowly like the spider) and "De Parel der Diplomatie" (The pearl of diplomats).

There was never any hard and fast division between the works in these two series. Gijzen's Antwerp books tell in more or less veiled terms



Raymond Brulez





H.M. Queen Elisabeth always took a keen interest in art and literature



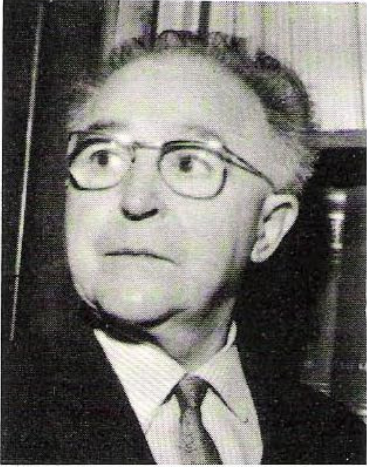
of the writer's difficult youth. These difficulties were not of a social character, for the circle he describes is of the lower middle class in Antwerp forty or fifty years ago, which combined a sense of economy with prosperity. The imaginative little boy's difficulties sprang from the fact that his sensibilities were constantly afflicted by the triteness of everyday life, by the rigorous demands of religion and the shortcomings of a too rigid school system. Later on, he suffered the pangs of an adolescent who discovers the gulf between ideals and reality, who is troubled by his budding sexual instincts and who is in quest of a deeper meaning of life which he could adopt as a guiding principle... It is this same man we meet again as an adult in the works of Gijsen's American cycle. He is still fighting against his education and the complexes it created in him. Even so, he may be said to have come to terms to some extent with society, while his eroticism has lost its tormented nature and his sternness has mellowed with the realisation that all things are relative. But a constant melancholy undertone in all his works still betrays his insatiable aspiration to idyllic though doubtless unattainable happiness, consisting of fraternal human kindness and woman as a consoling sister.

Marnix Gijsen's works reflect a perpetual process of introspection, yet they are saved from egocentrism by his sense of detachment and an ever-present sense of humour and virile stoicism. His delicately etched novels owe their penetration to two major qualities: psychological accuracy and uncompromising self-knowledge on the one hand and, on the other, the attentive and disarming lucidity of the emotional writer whose solid intellectual training has given him enough discipline to keep his intelligence under control. Mention should be made here of YVONNE DE MAN (1894) who, in a well-written novel "Een vrouw met Name Suzanna" (A woman named Susannah) gave a nimble but not altogether convincing retort to Joachim. Yvonne De Man has also written an autobiographical book "Voor Klaartje" (For Caroline).



Marnix Gijsen





Gerard Walschap

The reputation as a novelist of GERARD WALSCHAP (1898) dates back to the thirties. Educated according to traditional values, Walschap's works brought him into conflict with his Catholic brethren and, after a series of painful incidents, caused him to leave the Church before 1940. He remained a controversial figure until the time after the war, when his Catholic critics finally realised the sincerity of their "lost son". And although he has not returned to the fold, Walschap still has an important and fertile influence on the new Catholic novel. Since 1945 he has published "Ons Geluk" (Our happiness), "Zwart en Wit" (Black and white), "Moeder" (Mother), "Zuster Virgilia" (Sister Virgilia), "Oproer in Kongo" (Oproar in the Congo), "De Française" (The Frenchwoman), "De Avonturen van Tilman Armenaas" (The adventures of Tilman Armenaas), "De Verloren Zoon" (The prodigal son), "Nieuw Deps" (The new Deps), and a philosophical essay "Muziek voor Twee Stemmen" (Music for two voices).

The whole of Gerard Walschap's work is dominated by the problem of happiness, which he believes man must conquer on earth without necessarily following the path prescribed by the Church and without waiting to be rewarded in another world (the existence of which the writer vigorously rejects), with that which it has not been given to him to know on earth. But the writer's agnosticism and his vitally materialistic view of life have led him to wage a permanent battle for tolerance, so that it was wholly natural for him to choose the saintly life of Sister Virgilia as the subject for a book.

However, it would be wrong to regard Gerard Walschap as a philosopher who dresses his treatises up as novels. He is first and foremost an admirable narrator whose direct, captivating and sometimes popular style penetrates our innermost being, thus enabling us to share the life and dreams of his robustly drawn characters. Those who know his books well sometimes feel that he is on the verge of philosophising... But he hardly ever allows this craving to lead him into cumbersome speculation.



back or digressions, for he has always stood by the principle that above all a novel must tell a story. It is the story that gives birth to his unforgettable men and women who are straight from life as we know it; and it is the story which fosters Walschap's amazing psychological depth, including neuroses, without any of the conventional analytical or descriptive methods... But he obviously aspires to be a moralist, indeed it may well be this by which he sets the greatest store. Walschap is a master of the written word; his novels, which are not devoid of humour, do not contain a single page that is not a complete work of art.

There are few authors whose artistic maturity has been so deeply marked by the war as ALBERT VAN HOOGENBEMT (1900-1963). In 1939 he had already won the Triennial Prize for Literature with his novel "De Stille Man" (The quiet man). But the occupation confronted him with a crucial question: is an artist entitled to give himself up to poetic dreaming or escapism when a whole world is crumbling around him? Books such as "Oppassen, Marie, een gevaarlijke tijd" (Careful, Marie, these are dangerous times), "Vertrouwen in Ree" (Trust in Ree), "De Vlucht in het Lege" (Flight into the void), "De Opdracht van Simon Sablinsky" (The mission of Simon Sablinsky) and "De Hond in het Kegelspel" (The cat among the pigeons) provided his answer.

In these works Van Hoogenbemt, as a sincere Socialist and with the charming zeal of the neophyte, ventured into the social, political and philosophical spheres. He stood for youth and upright souls threatened by a corrupt society, and with pure and passionate enthusiasm demanded that the artists should shoulder his responsibility. Although his novels are anchored in the recent past or the present day, they emit the melancholy aura of the idealism of the twenties; hence his heroes of 1950-60 all have a weary, disillusioned air. Van Hoogenbemt believed sincerely that there was a burning need for a novelist's art that would help to develop



Albert Van Hoogenbemt





Maurice Gilliams

his contemporaries' sense of responsibility. But it is our feeling that he did not succeed in extracting from his essentially poetic, pictorial and meditative temperament the style which his ambition called for.

\* \* \*

MAURICE GILLIAMS (1900) was a believer in quality rather than quantity. Owing to my desire to give our modern literature as broad and unquestionable a basis as possible, I have in a past evaluation of "Elias of het Gevecht met de Nachtegalen" (Elias or the battle with the nightingales), published in 1936, dismissed too blandly the influence of Alain Fournier and Rilke which is so striking in this author's work. This is not the result of slavish imitation, but of an affinity between writers issuing from the same collective subconscious. A quarter of a century later "Winter te Antwerpen" (Winter in Antwerp) may well be regarded as an addendum to "Elias"; it shows similar self-analysis and psychological isolation, but at the same time it is impregnated with an atmosphere which to me seems truer and more intense. With Gilliams, we always tend to be fumbling in the dark, despite his concrete descriptions and a good many pages which are without doubt among the most atmosphere-laden in the whole of Dutch literature. The irresistible appeal of this slow, majestic prose written with an almost sensual caress, issues from the constant felt presence of some indefinable mystery somewhere in the background. But this mystery may well be connected with the erotic images and anguish which are rooted deep in childhood and which some people never succeed in bringing to the surface...

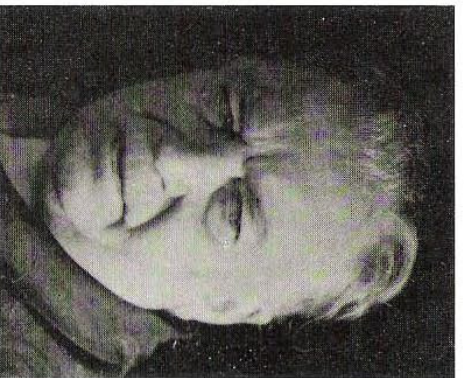
MAURICE ROELANTS (1895-1967) is usually regarded as the writer who, in the late twenties, once and for all introduced in Flanders the psychological novel in the tradition of Mauriac. "Gebed om een goed einde" (Prayer for a good death) is a moving tale of this childhood.





"Winter in Antwerp"





Filip De Pillecijn

LODE ZIELENS (1901-1944) was at the pinnacle of fame when he was killed in Antwerp by the explosion of a "flying bomb". He left two parts of a trilogy, two thick volumes entitled "Alles wordt betaald" (Everything has to be paid for) and "Mensen als Wij" (Men such as we) which read as a serial-story, happily combining romanticism with social realism

Social factors also predominate in the work of ACHILLES MUSSCHE (1896), both in "Aan de Voet van het Belfort" (At the foot of the belfry) a stirring chronicle of the weavers' struggle for emancipation, and in the biographical novel "Een Gedenksteen voor Rosa" (A memorial stone for Rosa Luxemburg). Books such as these are unique in Flanders but tend to be over-solemn when the writer ventures wholeheartedly into the proletarian struggle. Achilles Mussche has also published a modern prose version of "Reinaert de Vos" (Reynaert the Fox) and a collection of short stories entitled "Dat arme Beetje Mens" (That poor little man).

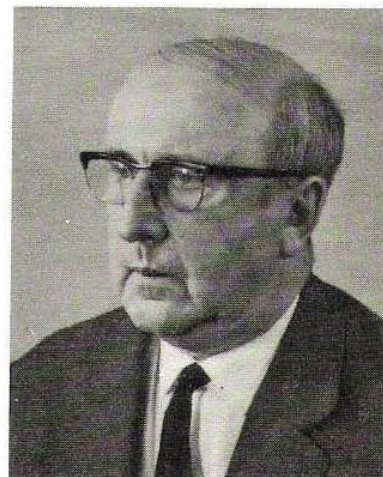
The social element is more closely integrated with the artistic concept in "Mensen achter de Dijk" (Behind the sea-wall), by FILIP DE PILLECIJN (1891-1962), who often drew on the memories of his youth to write the work. For him too the years after the war were among his most productive. In books such as "De Veerman en de Jonkvrouw" (The ferryman and the young lady) and "Vaandrig Antoon Serjacobs" (Ensign Antoon Serjacobs), he gave free course to his taste for historical atmosphere, for eroticism purified by poetry and for the romanticism of warrior life. "Aanvaard het Leven" (Accept life) suffers to some extent from the fact that his sensibility did not predispose him to contemporary psychological realism. But the book was born of De Pillecijn's inner urge to provide his testimony about the post-war repression policy. This raised problem which could not be solved in the terms of a novelist whose writing depended for its quality on the inter-weaving of his memories. Shortly after



wards, the tenor of his work once again became exceedingly pure in his biographies devolved to "Rochus" and "Elisabeth".

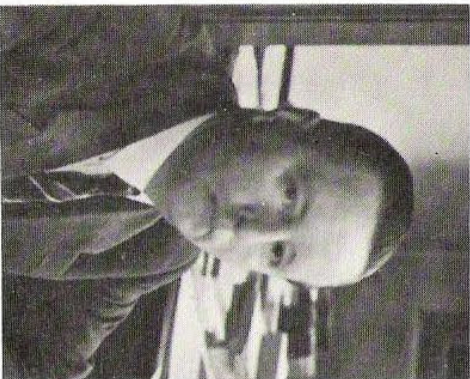
The passionate temperament of GASTON DURIBREUX (1903) is in striking contrast with the serenity emanating from De Pillecijn's finest pages. Duribreux's preference is for characters who are dominated by their instincts but, at the same time, he rejects any solutions for their problems which are not in line with Catholic morality. This enhances the tension of his tales to such a point as to give them an intensity which stirs the very recesses of the soul. Because of this, "De Zure Druiven" (Bitter Grapes), a novel about rebellion, becomes more of a book about war: it is the testament of a generation thirsting for moral "cleanliness". Ethics rather than politics form the backbone of this book, which offers a striking picture of the generosity, idealism and search for true values of a young generation that had to taste the bitter fruits of hatred, persecution and intolerance... Again, it is a moral problem on a religious framework which is the subject of "Kantwerk en Zwanen" (Lace and Swans), a story of frustrated love between two people who meet too late... Duribreux is a writer who takes no active part in literary meetings and forums. Nevertheless his influence on the new Catholic novel, which is discussed further on, must not be under-estimated.

He has explored the relationship between God and man not only in the titles already listed, but also in short stories such as "De Parabel van de Gehate Farizeeër" (Parable of the hated Pharisee) and "De Parabel van de Geliefde Tollenaar" (Parable of the beloved Publican), and in his novels "Tussen Duivel en Diepzee" (Between the devil and the deep blue sea) and "Schipper Jarvis" (Skipper Jarvis), a more popular work about fishermen.



Gaston Duribreux





Eugène Bosschaert

The short stories of KAREL JONCKHEERE (1906) which have been published under the collective title "Spiegelgevecht met Dubbelgangers" (Fighting and your shadow) are not typical of this poet's work. He has published outstanding books of travel on Mexico and the Congo, but they fall outside the scope of this brief survey. In prose he has published "De Vogels hebben hem gezien" (The birds saw it), a moving reminiscence of his own youth.

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The concept of "youth" and "old age" is very relative when applied to writers. In Flanders, it will remain the custom, as I stressed at the beginning of this brochure, to claim that the transition towards a younger generation of novelists was effected by a group of writers born between 1912 and 1920, and whose work began to appear during the war. This group includes JOHAN DAISNE (1912), LOUIS-PAUL BOON (1912), PIE VAN AKEN (1920) and HUBERT LAMPO (1920). (1)

The emergence of these four authors was purely accidental, as was their presence around Teirlinck on the staff of the "Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift" later on.

In 1942, "De Trap van Steen en Wolken" (The steps of stone and cloud) was hailed as a revelation. "De Trap" introduced a new style in which the author described as "magical realism". The action takes place on at least two parallel planes, and the story unfolds as "a novel within a novel". However, the book differs from earlier works assembled this way in that at times the author interweaves the different strands

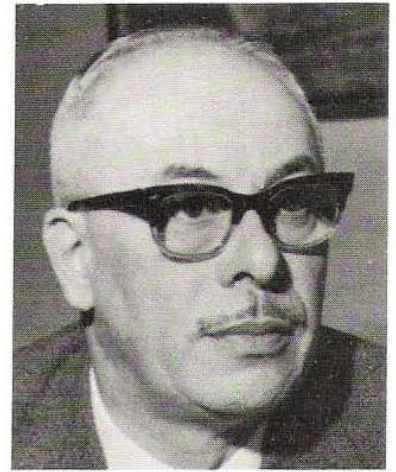
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(1) Should the writer of this essay mention his own work? This was a delicate problem, for in doing so he might appear immodest. Even so, for the sake of completeness, he has ventured to offer some comments which he believes to be object



sh the narrative, only to separate them again further on. In this way dreams  
ing and real life are constantly intertwined: on the one hand we have a  
nd pleasant family tale set in the university and in an old castle on the banks  
ope of the river Lys; and, on the other hand, a romantic escape into the Great  
he American North. Johan Daisne makes no secret of the fact that he is  
a follower of Bontempelli, Pierre Benoit, Rider Haggard, Gustav Meyrinck,  
Alain-Fournier and the early film producers. The analytical psychology  
of the collective subconscious and Jung's archetypes together form the  
intellectual foundation whence his stone steps, solidly rooted in reality,  
rise up towards the clouds of dreams and magic. In "Zes Domino's voor  
rouwen" (Six women's masks) and "Met Dertien aan Tafel" (Thirteen  
at table) the writer has collected both early and recent works in which  
the magical is conditioned by parapsychology, the breach of continuity  
in space and time, the cult of youth and partly fortuitous fantasy.

Magical realism in the tender yet harsh "De Man die zijn haar kort liet  
nippen" (The man who had his hair cut short) springs from the psycho-  
pathic tensions of the hero whose hopeless love for his young pupil, Fran,  
fills the gulf between the real and the imaginary. In "Lago Maggiore"  
psychological realism seems to be uppermost, but actually this book affords  
another development of magical realism, based on the author's complete  
and deliberate elimination of the frontiers between "real life" and "literary  
life". In the writer's work these two concepts become increasingly closely  
interwoven, in a way that the uninitiated may find difficult to follow. This  
is the case in "De Neusvleugel der Muze" (Touched by the Muse), a  
partially documentary film novel, and especially in "Baratzeartea" a book  
about a trip in the Basque country. In this latter work, the autobiographical  
part is so important that, under the influence of his daily contact with  
literature and the cinema, Daisne felt compelled to insert some long essays  
into it (about Peter Benoit and about his friend Filip De Pillecijn, who  
died while the book was being written). In "Baratzeartea" dreams are



Johan Daisne





Louis-Paul Boon

more than ever an essential extension of reality, offering an escape for the affair between the youthful Fabienne and the ageing narrator, who identified with the novelist. It is this same atmosphere which pervades "Ontmoeting in de zonnekeer" (Meeting in the solstice).

Self-made man LOUIS-PAUL BOON, son of a working class family, the very opposite of aristocratic Johan Daisne. Yet they have several characteristics in common: Boon is not only possessed by an almost physical need to write, but his kaleidoscopic work also reflects the permanent osmosis between everyday life and its artistic sublimation. His first works were chaotic and seemingly impulsive yet incisive; they revealed his social awareness and his urgent desire for justice: "De Voorstad groeit" (The suburb is growing), "Abel Gholaerts" (Abel Gholaerts), "Vergeten Straat" (Forgotten street) and the marvellous volume of sketches entitled "Mijn kleine Oorlog" (My small war).

At the time of the resistance to Nazi terror and in the confusion of the post-war period, he probably regarded himself as the bearer of an apparently orthodox social realist message. But it became increasingly clear that this delicate revolutionary needed ideological orthodoxy. Fortunately his subsequent flirtation with the avant-garde, which resulted from his self-culture, hardly affected his genius. It doubtless contributed to the gigantic conception of his sagas "De Kapellekensbaan" (Chapel lane) and "Zomer te Termuren" (Summer in Termuren), which evolve simultaneously on different planes. This illustrates the writer's belief that the author must not be divorced from his creative imagination; he builds the unity of a work stage by stage, describing over a period of several years the life of the poorest proletariat and the daily life of a novel among his family and friends. The story of the adolescent Ondine and of her pitiful brother, Valère, constitute the books' principal theme.



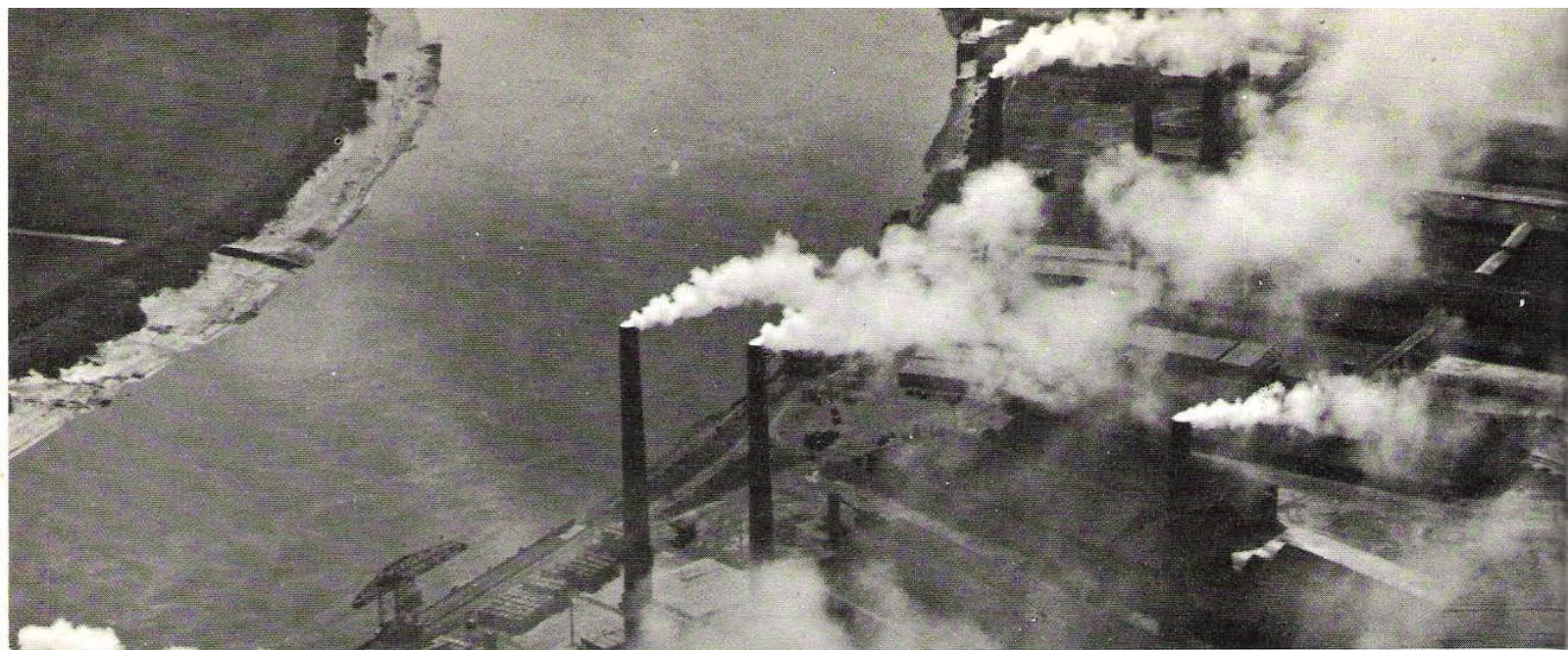


Countess Hélène d'Hespel, wearing a tiara, seated among the artists invited to participate in the annual meeting organised in her castle, "Driekoningen", at Beernem.

... thousand pages of these very long novels contain nothing that is not significant.

Problems of style and structure simply do not exist for Boon. He writes with the utmost ease. It seems as if, by jotting down a few brief reporter's notes, he can produce a meaningful book. At the same time, he escapes from all aesthetic and critical criteria. Although his readers may at times feel disappointed by "De Paradijsvogel" (Bird of paradise), which mingles art with artifice, although they may doubt the psychological and social authenticity of "Niets gaat ten onder" (Nothing is wasted) or





Smoke fanning out along the Rupel means hard labour in the brickworks.

feel irritation at the erotic emphasis in "Menuet", still they realise that, Boon's case, his fragmentary work counts for little. For he is an astounding ocean of verbal intoxication, without shores, without an end or beginning, a Himalaya of poetic obsession, pushed to the very extreme of absolute, anarchic individualism.

However, he is also capable of more intimate writing and can be moved by the little things of life to produce well-nigh folkloric works, as in "Bende van Jan de Lichte" (Jan de Lichte's gang) and "De Zoon van Jan de Lichte" (Jan de Lichte's son). It would be difficult to blame the rebellious and childishly egocentric Boon for being subject, as we all are, to the human laws which endow us and him with the qualities that go with our faults. His book "Dorp in Vlaanderen" (Village in Flanders) reprints a series of descriptive pieces first published in the press.

PIET VAN AKEN (1920), like Boon, is a born novelist, but his dislike of improvisation and informal writing places him poles apart from Boon.



was born in the Rupel area, and many of his tales are set against the industrial background of brickworks and clay-pits in which he spent his youth. This however does not classify him as a regional writer: his Rupel landscape is as universal as the imaginary Yoknapatawpha County of Faulkner's novels.

At first, the lyrical element predominated in his work. "De Falende God" (Failure of a God), set in a undefined mythical past, relates the establishment of the brick-making industry along the banks of the Rupel by a silent stranger who was said to have come from a distant land. In "Het Hart van de Klok" (The heart and the clock), he relates the brickworkers' hard and determined struggle in a more concrete 19th century; every page of this book is deeply evocative, showing great psychological insight and a subtle affinity with the impenetrable mysteries of the soul, especially the feminine soul. In "De Duivel vaart in ons" (Possessed by the devil), Van Aken reverts to the mythical dimension. A more realistic, poetical and highly animated plot emerges in this story of the battle for the youthful Godelieve between Joker the adventurer and Claude the intellectual.

Gradually, the novelist has come to attach increasing importance to the philosophic and social element, as in "Alleen de Doden ontkomen" (Only the dead escape") which depicts the searing bitterness of the Resistance fighters. Back from the Ardennes maquis, they realise that their sacrifices, motivations and the idealism that caused them to risk their life have brought little change in a bourgeois society busily erasing the fearful traces left by the war.

"Het Begeren" (Desire) is a masterly short novel full of atmosphere, the plot of which is a curious mixture of eroticism and thirst for justice.



Piet Van Aken





"The rider in the sky"

"De wilde Jaren" (The wild years) deals with juvenile delinquency but Van Aken is far more concerned with the hero's spiritual redemption. Many regard Van Aken's short story "Klinkaart" (Brick) as his masterpiece, even though the book's sole purpose is to give a sober, painstaking description of a young girl's first working day in a brickwork.

Another important work is "De Nikkers" (The Niggers), the tough narration of a dramatic strike by negro workers in an industrial concern in the Congo during the second world war. To my mind, this novel affords definite proof of the fact that, in Van Aken's work, the social element serves simply as the medium for another problem which affects him far more deeply, that of human liberty. Further proof of this may be found in "De Verraders" (The traitors) which deals with the arrest, the self-mastery and the death, in the tragic month of May 1940, of the leader of an authoritarian movement, who is in fact a respectable man but who the German invasion has inevitably rendered suspect.

"De Onschuldige Barbaren" (The innocent barbarians) has a special place in Van Aken's work. Related to some extent to Steinbeck's "Tort Flat" and "Cannery Row", it is a wholly spontaneous reminiscence of the world in which the writer spent his youth, on the borderline between the country and the industrial area, in an atmosphere consisting of folk superstition, salaciousness and childish dreams.

Piet Van Aken's most recent works are "De Jager, niet de Prooi" (The hunter, not the prey) and "Slapende Honden" (Sleeping dogs).

In graphic form, the artistic development of HUBERT LAMPO (1894-1934) as compared to that of the previous three writers would doubtless show the most capricious curve. After "Don Juan en de laatste Nimf" (Don Giovanni and the last nymph), which was his first literary venture,



Published two novels, "Helene Defraye" and "De Ruiters op de Wolken" (The Mander in the sky) issuing from the highly intellectual, psychological realism favoured in the thirties by Charles Morgan, Aldous Huxley and Georges Duhamel, whose disciple he was at that time. Although the critics usually praised his books, which were given to detailed psychological analysis and set in intellectual circles, Lampo decided in 1950 to discard a literary manner which he felt had become outmoded and sterile. This led to "De Belofte aan Rachel" (The promise to Rachel), a deliberately anachronistic version of Joseph's life in Egypt, in which he sought to synthesize the political and historic experience of his generation. It is a determinedly humanistic rendering of the way in which this generation grappled with the crucial problem of individual freedom.

"De Belofte aan Rachel", so the author claimed, rendered any repetition of its kind superfluous. But this claim is not enough to explain the inspiration for a novel such as "Terugkeer naar Atlantis" (Return to Atlantis) built around the poetic theme of the presentiment that there is another dimension to human life. After which, in "De Duivel en de Maagd" (The devil and the virgin), Lampo again grappled with the unknown, through the intermediary of Gilles de Rais whom he regards as a seeker after God in reverse.

However, a deep-seated melancholy sentiment caused the writer to be taunted by the poetic encounter which led to "Terugkeer naar Atlantis" and which seemed to obey a kind of psychic imperative. In the end, this state of mind led him to write "De Komst van Joachim Stiller" (The Advent of Joachim Stiller), a messianic novel with a real world setting showing the mysterious advent of a messianic archetype, previously heralded in "Terugkeer naar Atlantis" and numerous older tales, now collected together in the volume "Dochters van Lemurië" (Daughters of Lemurie).



Hubert Lampo



He belonged to the "De Faun" (The Faun) group, clandestinely formed in Ghent during the war, the central figure of which was PAUL ROGGHE (1904). Though chiefly a poet, Rogghé is the author of "Anna Golochin" a short but subtle and enchanting love story, inspired by Stendhal's theme of the woman who offers a traveller hospitality and the gift of her body.

ANDRE DESPLENTER (1920) also belonged to the very confined conspiracy of the "Faun". He wrote deep and incisive psychological novels such as "De Witte Weg" (The white path), "De Onbewogen Vlucht" (Immobilized flight) and "Vogelvrij" (Outlaw), which are all reminiscent of the calm surface of a pond beneath which a mysterious, seething life can be divined.

The Flemings have fought long and hard to obtain recognition of the validity of their culture. In the process they have acquired a series of complexes and conditioned reflexes which sometimes cause them to transcend the limits of proper self-criticism. Naturally endowed as they are with a hereditary gift for narration, they always have to fight their intrinsic distrust of the fruits of a simple narrative talent, however respectable and spontaneous. To a certain extent VALERE DEPAUW (1912) has been the victim of this complex, certainly as regards the artistic value of his work. The fact that he has written several colloquial novels should not blind us to the undeniable literary merit of novels such as "Een handvol Aarde" (A handful of earth), "Breitz Atao", a story about the Breton fight for emancipation or "Opdracht in Guernica" (Mission in Guernica) which is a generous declaration of solidarity with the Basque people.

Journalist GEORGES HEBBELINCK (1916-1964) was a committed writer of the humanistic meaning of the term. In "Het Meisje in de Kelder" (The girl in the cellar), "De Rozen van Kazanlik" (Roses of Kazanlik),



Valère Depauw





Bert Van Aerschot

"De Journalist" (The Journalist) and "De Trein reed door het Dal" (The train crossed the valley) he sought to elucidate the condition of contemporary man in the light of the gigantic and terrifying upheavals of the second world war, the resistance and concentration camps, political persecution in Central Europe in the thirties, the Spanish civil war and social strife in his own country. "De Journalist" stresses the importance of freedom of conscience and ethics in this profession. Hebbelinck wrote this book in the taught, nervous and deliberately pared down style that was characteristic of him, and which made him an important figure in Flemish literature today, not only because of his ethical concern but also because of his clear, direct writing.

BERT VAN AERSCHOT (1917) is an uneven author, but one whose work never leaves the reader indifferent. In "De Lift" (Hitchhike) his very real gifts are not used convincingly. "Bittere Wijn" (Sour wine) and "De Vrouwen" (The Women) reflect his quest for elusive happiness through an erotic and alcoholic haze. In "De Gebroeders" (The brothers) a paroxysmal work, he tackles the nuclear danger and in "Het Einde van een Reis" (End of a journey) he displays an amazing insight into his own innermost being. Lastly, his remarkable novel "De Kinderen van Atlas" (Children of Atlas) lays bare bourgeois hypocrisy and the human causes behind it with a compassion that is reminiscent of Simenon.

The works of RENE J. SEGHERS (1904) sometimes reflect his aspirations towards poetic surrealism, but this he rarely attains. Two of his books "Sonate voor Louise" (Sonata for Louise) and "Spoken in de Dwaal" (Ghosts in the maze).

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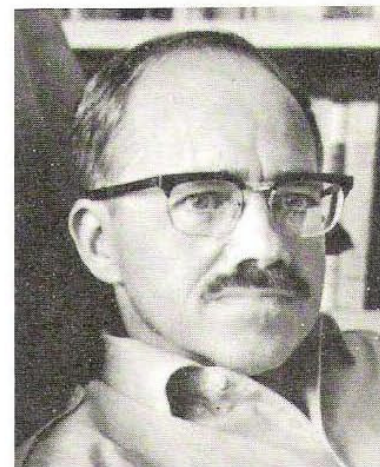
The younger the authors under review, the less justified would be attempt at classification. Here differences in age are of little consequence.



(That are replaced by imponderable factors of an artistic, philosophical and ideological nature. Some writers seem to be so much preoccupied with their subject, that the only possible classification would be by subject matter. Others embark on a more adventurous experimental vein, after a wholly conventional start. And then there are those who are famous as avant-garde poets or expositors, but whose novels usually abide by the traditional epic pattern.

JAN WALRAVENS (1920-1965) forged a link between Flanders and the new artistic and intellectual movements abroad. He was influenced by existentialism but later reacted against it. In matters of literary form he is not given to experimentation and in his novels "Roerloos aan Zee" (Immobile by the sea) and "Negatief" (Negative), he explores the final situation, without issue, of contemporary man. The work is presented as if the writer were a biologist; he describes his characters as if they were guinea-pigs and he studies their behaviour in situations which are arbitrarily created but nevertheless credible. It is undeniable that there are masochists such as the unfortunate hero of "Negatief" but I doubt if such paranoid characters would be able to analyse themselves with the black, reasoning lucidity of Pierre Esneux.

There could be endless discussion too as to whether HUGO CLAUS (1929) is mainly a poet, a playwright or a novelist. He is at all events an interesting, multiple personality, both in his novels, his poems and his plays. He is highly susceptible to foreign influences, and is reminiscent of such writers as Cesare Pavese, Truman Capote, Carson McCullers and Jack Kerouac. Because he wrote it at such an early age, he must be forgiven the similarity in atmosphere between "De Metsiers" (Duck hunting) and the works of Caldwell and Faulkner. "De Hondsdagen" (The dog days), a more mature work, is a harrowing description of a group of young people who adopt an attitude of vegetative indifference towards life. "De Koele Minnaar" (The cool lover) is located partly in a similar



Jan Walravens





Hugo Claus

setting, but is a more convincing book. In it Claus's writing is far more concrete, and the colourful characters in this brilliant tale, who move about the underworld of the Italian film industry, convey a sense of authentic, hot blooded life. A similar but to my mind even stronger feeling of reality emanates from the tales and sketches in "De Zwarte Keizer" (The black emperor) with children as the principal characters. It is odd that even the adult characters in Claus's books often resemble slightly unadvanced adolescents who have not yet succeeded entirely in grasping the rules of the game among grown-ups.

The insane hero of "De Verwondering" (Amazement) is also close to the world of childhood, and one can see why this masterly work was described as "a dark Grand Meaulnes" by one critic. "Omtrent Dee-Dee" (About Dee-Dee) had a mixed reception, but only an author of unusual stature could have painted such a powerful picture of a small family gathering in the house of a country parson, which degenerates into an orgy, a corner of hell on earth, each participant flayed by his own individual tragedy.

"De Heilige Gramschap" (The holy fury) by MAURICE D'HAESE (1919-1990) is one of the most convincing literary works inspired by the Resistance. But in "De Witte Muur" (The white wall), the sad criminal confession is far less convincing. The colourful short stories in "Verhalen" (Tales) often give the impression of being intelligent and intentional pastiches (Claus, Belcampo, Kafka).

Both in the artistic and in the human field, there is a vast distance between the earliest and most recent works of IVO MICHIELS (1913-1990). Despite differences in form, a single leitmotiv lends inner cohesion to his works entitled "Het Vonnis" (The sentence), "De Kruistocht der Jongelingen" (The crusade of young people) and "De Ogenbank" (The eye bank), namely the painful readjustment of a man who has been de-



and permanently wounded by the war and who passionately wants to see clearly into himself. Michiels achieved complete maturity with "Het geschied" (The farewell), a beautiful psychological novel of introspection, and in the fascinating stories of "Journal Brut" (Draft diary). In "Het boek Alpha", (The Alpha book) the author set out to discard the traditional form of the novel entirely by making a spectrographic analysis of a brief period of effective tension which he succeeds in isolating in his hero's mind. Thus he shows that the briefest and tiniest fraction of the present is conditioned by a multitude of impressions from the past. But it would be wrong simply to classify as an experimental work a novel in which memories of the past play such an important part, despite the unusual form of the composition: to Michiels, the indissoluble unity between past and present is a facet of man's tragic fate.

After a modest start as a novelist with "Links van de Helikopterlijn" (To the left of the runway), HUGO RAES (1929) attracted attention with his sincere "De Vadsige Koningen" (The do-nothing Kings), a rough and often burlesque account of the way in which a group of contemporaries, intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, unavoidably conditioned by their petty bourgeois environment, seek compensation in a bohemian existence which they refuse to give up. His following work "Een faun met kille Horentjes" (The faun with cold horns) reached even a wider public.

CLAUDE C. KRIJGELMANS (1934) is still an enigmatic figure; endowed with a vertiginous gift for words, he will — after his "Messiah" — have to choose between his baroque experiment and acceptance of the fact that language is a means of communication and not a barrier. Extravagant and difficult though it is, Krijgelmans' writing has the overwhelming strength of a fully stretched genius, flowing from a well-nigh inaccessible inner silence. The advanced modern prose of PAUL DE WISPELAERE (1928) in "Mijn levende Schaduw" (My living shadow), of LAURENT VEYT (1936) in



Ivo Michiels





Ward Ruyslinck

"Het Lichamelijk Onderscheid" (Bodily distinction), of the subtle and intelligent writer WILLY ROGGMAN (1934) in "Blues voor glazen Blazen" (Blues for glass trumpets) and of RENE GYSEN (1936-1969) in "Grillen van Kathleen" (Capricious Kathleen) endows these works with an entirely different psychological format. Except perhaps for Roggeman, who is the most talented writer in a group which includes many others too, the writers do not base their works on actual happenings. They may at times draw inspiration from the works of their contemporaries, or else from the better experiments taking place in other countries (e.g. the new novel). One may ask therefore how their work will develop when foreign literary fashions change. That perhaps will be the moment when these writers find their own course.

Several other writers may be included in this same generation of formalists. They have not, either by their style or their composition, sought to astound by resorting to experimental methods, but they have aimed to express present-day life formally and fervently.

WARD RUYSLINCK (1929) is the most important of them. His novel "De Ontaarde Slapers" (The degenerate sleepers) is about the loss of human dignity, due to the constant war psychosis. It may be that in "Wierook en Tranen" (Incense and tears), the story of two children caught up in the exodus of 1940, he did not attain the same perfection and that his collection "De Madonna met de Buil" (The virgin with the bruise) was artistically less ambitious, but his monumental "Het Dal van Hinnom" (The vale of Hinnom) was a considerable success and went to dismiss these objections. Brilliantly written and exacting in form, the book castigates the lies and vices of our present society. In humorous passages the writer sometimes distorts his perspective and indulges in parody, at other times he adopts a fearful, frightening realism in order to denounce the moral and social shortcomings of the era.



nte "Het stille Zomer" (The quiet summer) show that Ruyslinck is not in fact the revolutionary anarchist the reader might suspect him to be, after reading "Het al van Hinnom". Above all he is a sad, desolate man who wants a better world for his fellow humans. This is confirmed by "Het Reservaat" (The reserve), a novel which at first seems to be concerned simply with a disciplinary complaint that has been lodged against a secondary school teacher for fairly futile motives. But as we read on, we realise that the author has in fact posed the whole problem of freedom. Oddly enough he does so not by inventing an authoritarian state, in the manner of Huxley or Orwell, but by siting his plot in a society which still pays lip-service to the rules of democracy although it is in fact slipping into the most hateful of political dictatorships. Ruyslinck's latest works are "De Paandevleeseters" (The facade), "Golden Ophelia" and "Het Ledikant van Lady Cant" (Lady Cant's bed).

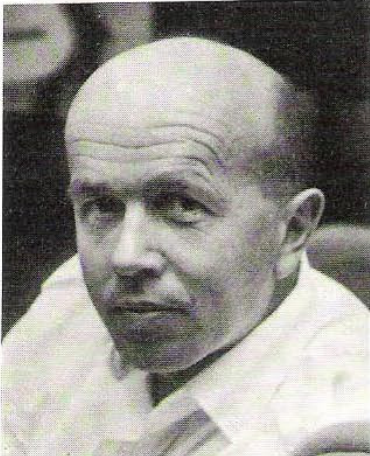
In "De Muur" (The wall) and "De Vijand" (The enemy), a somewhat uneven collection, JOS VANDELOO (1925) also decries the fate of modern man who has increasingly to be content with only a semblance of freedom. The typical theme of the atomic danger and atomic contagion is oppressively developed in "Het Gevaar" (The Danger). But Vandeloo's artistic personality comes pleasingly to the foreground in "Het Huis der Onbekenden" (The house of strangers) which belongs to the magic realist school. Once the phenomenon has been announced by the complete elimination of all members of his circle, the hero—a happy man in the flower of youth—withdrawn by a vague and mysterious supernatural law from normal space and time. In "Coladrinkers" (Drinkers of Coca-Cola), Jos Vandeloo ascribes the meaningless and morose hippie-world.

LIBERA CARLIER (1926), a former sea captain and now a river pilot on the Scheldt, has published several novels, "De Zondagsslepers" (The



Jos. Vandeloo





Libera Carlier

Sunday towers), "Duel met de Tanker" (Duel with a tanker) and "Piraten" (Pirates) inspired by the sailor's life and highly authentic in atmosphere thanks to the author's detailed technical knowledge. But Carlier's work is not confined solely to a kind of maritime folklore, he has also sought inspiration in other fields: "Action, Station, Go..." is a great Resistance novel, written with persuasive eloquence, while the social and economic problems of our era provide the framework of "Het Kanaal" (The canal) and "De Vlucht" (Flight) is a story set in wartime.

"Teder als Trotyl" (Tender as trotyl) (1) deals with the oppression of small minorities by the centralised contemporary state. Carlier takes his subject matter from the burning problems of our era; his merit lies in the fact that, in a probingly convincing manner reminiscent at times of Van Aken, he relates the fatal, concrete and often dramatic confrontation of the individual with these seemingly abstract problems.

The critics have unanimously regretted the fact that WIM MEEWIS (1913) has published nothing since "Geen Scherzo voor de Goden" (No scherzo for the gods), a tenderly virile book which does not view the post-war youth solely via the boredom and the moral and psychological maladjustment of beatniks and delinquents.

FRANS DE BRUYN (1924) first issued a series of harsh short stories which he called "Tekens in Steen" (Designs in stone). His disillusioned view of human life and tribulations gives an impression of cynicism, whereas in fact it derives from the vulnerable nature of an idealist who wants to save the world with his idealism. "De Regen schuilt in Ons" (The rain shelters within us), a brief and slightly halting book, is bathed in the same atmosphere.

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(1) Trotyl is an explosive





...youth in our modern society...





Carla Walschap

The writer is at his best in "Een Hobbelpaard voor Hansje" (A rocking horse for Hansje), a well written, witty and often tender detective story.

The battle for human freedom is also the predominant theme of JAN DE ROP (1920), but it is tinged with eroticism in "De Wachttijd" (The time of waiting), the story of a young Jewess who is convinced that her life and death depend on the return of the much older man she loved because circumstances compelled her to lead a clandestine life. "De traditie" (The tradition) is about the socialist struggle of the industrial proletariat in Ghent over a period of three generations, seen through the eyes of women from whom the heaviest sacrifices are usually expected. The writer's books are reminiscent of those by the older EUGENIE BOON (1903) who gave a poetic and comfortingly refreshing rendering of childhood in "Het Kind en de Ster" (The child and the star). "De Vierde Wijk" (The fourth district), which is the sequel to this book, relates the heroine's adolescence but is at the same time a warm and colorful description of life in a popular suburb of Antwerp in the poor and hungry years of the first world war.

"De Ontploffing" (The explosion) by witty PROSPER DE SMET (1932) also deals with the daily life of a working class district, but this time in Ghent. The writer is said to be working on the tender and ironical autobiography of a young proletarian, but so far only brief fragments of this have appeared in the literary reviews.

CARLA WALSCHAP (1932) began by writing a delicate tale about an old man and a monkey, "Niet schreien, Ouwe" (Don't cry old man). Then, in "Hart voor Hart" (Heart for heart), she explored the psychological mysteries of an adolescent crisis while in "Rozen van Jericho" (Rose of Jericho) she made a tactful analysis of a situation bordering on the edge of madness.



FRANK LIEDEL (1924) is a writer of whom more and more is heard. The atmosphere in his short stories is at times reminiscent of Heinrich Böll. However, he has shown the full scope of his literary ability in his novel "De Kaperbrief" (The privateer's letter); with penetrating insight into social realities and keen psychological observation, this book dissects the greed and ambition of the petty bourgeois in a modern consumer society.

In the past few years FERNAND AUWERA (1929) has issued some impressive novels such as "De Weddenschap" (The wager), "De Donderzonen" (The sons of thunder) and "De Koning van de Bijen" (The king of the bees). These books do not reflect a gratuitous attitude but a form of surrealism which is both morally and philosophically justified, and which attains its culminating point in "Mathias 't Kofschip". Moreover, in his collection of short stories entitled "Vogels met rode Beulskoppen" (Birds with red hangmen's heads), he showed that he had also mastered this difficult art. In these short stories he gives his all. It is a pity that this productive writer, who has already won acclaim in the Netherlands, is still attracting less interest than the impotent upstarts of the literary no man's land who have not so far succeeded in producing a single valid work. It is our impression that DIRK DE WITTE (1934), an intelligent writer who gives a very good description of "De Reis naar Metylene" (Voyage to Mytilene), and ESTERE MICHEL D'HONDT (1937) who in "God in Vlaanderen" (God in Flanders) and "Zeven geestige Knaapjes" (Seven witty boys) makes a poetic exploration of unusual erotic areas, are also to a large extent the victims of the literary phenomenon denounced above and which fortunately will not prove to be lasting.

Not everyone will agree that the contemporary Flemish Catholic novel should be discussed separately, since this may create the impression that it exists in a state of prejudicial isolation from the rest of Flemish literature. But my purpose in giving it a separate place is simply to underline the

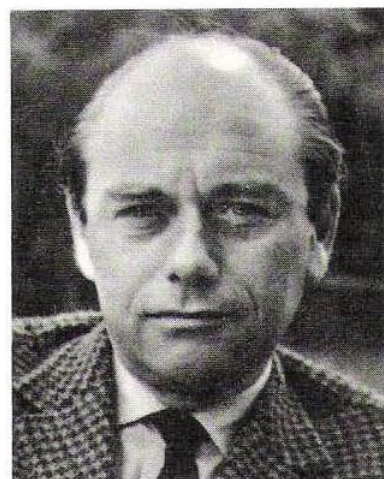


Frank Liedel



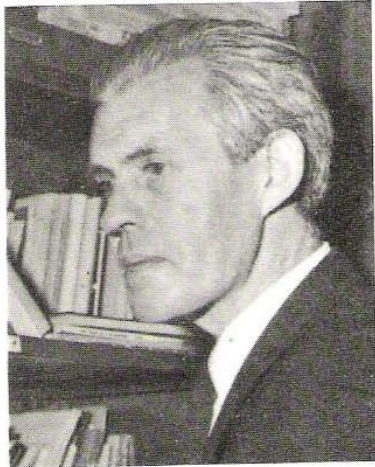
...able proof was provided by "Ik was een Kristen" (I was a Christian), an impressive and admirably well documented historical fresco about Julian the Apostate, the 4th century Roman Emperor. "Dood van een Non" (Death of a nun) brought us back to the present day with the story of Sabine Arnould who, as the result of an ancient promise, enters a convent upon the death of her husband. But the young woman's independent, rebellious character compels her to leave. Finally she loses her life while visiting Japan as a journalist, and the possibility that she committed suicide owing to an inner conflict, is not entirely ruled out... Although Sabine leaves the convent where her younger sister has died, this does not mean that, as the daughter of an old humanist family, she now rejects God, for she believes that, purified by solitude, her faith will earn her divine grace. In this work, Maria Rosseels has tackled in remarkably honest fashion a series of problems relating to the links between man and his Creator. These are problems which the Flemish novel is now discussing for the first time.

...in "De Wereld verandert" (The world is changing) and "Maar er is een uitweg" (But there is a way out), by the psychologist FRANS VAN ISACKER (1920), the presence of the religious factor is perhaps less obvious. In these carefully detailed, generously written books the writer examines concepts and situations that have been modified by the war. In "Kortstondige Onthoofding" (Brief beheading), a father's anguish upon the birth of his child is told in moving yet witty vein. "Postume Wandeling" (Posthumous walk) is a moving but stoical farewell to a well-loved father, filled with nostalgia and steady resignation. "De Reis naar Ispahan" (Journey to Ispahan), written in counterpoint, illustrates the fragility of human happiness and culls its dramatic strength from the disconcerting contrast between an optimistic beginning and a painful ending. The religious problem is not in itself the subject of Van Isacker's books, but it has influenced his works, notably "De Bruidegom van mijn Ziel" (My soul's bridegroom), a deeply introspective volume.



Frans Van Isacker





Valeer Van Kerkhoven

The religious commitment of VALEER VAN KERKHOVEN (1919) is of course much greater: in "Dies Irae" it reaches a paroxysm, with its heavy sense of fatality and its surprising unity of time, site and action, strongly reminiscent of a classical Greek tragedy in which divine wrath has taken the place of destiny. In "De Weerlozen" (The defenceless), God is not absent, but in the psychological novel it is the human will which predominates. As to "De Bungalow" (The Bungalow), this relates the poetical tale of a sensitive village child whose adolescence is marked by subtle emotions.

BERNARD KEMP (1926) is the most intellectual representative of the young Catholic generation. "Het Laatste Spel" (The last game), "De Dioskuren" (The Dioscuri) and "De Kater van Orfeus" (Orpheus's cat) are the maturely constructed novels of an analytical mind intent on seeing clearly into itself. "De Glimlachende God" (The smiling deity) is an intelligent and well constructed city novel, in which Kemp treats the ancient theme of sin and purification in a thoroughly contemporary manner. The characterization is excellent and the young people who figure in the book are closer to civilized present-day society than the vulgar and pseudo-cultural fauna so many young writers use to project their own frustrations and yearnings.

The oldest of the group of Catholic novelists, FRED GERMONPREZ (1900) was at first concerned mainly with social problems; later on he used the past as a background for the difficulties encountered by his passionate characters in popular and sometimes historical novels such as "De Moerduive" (The devils of the marsh), "Mensen in de Schaduw" (Men in the shadow), "Hanen en Kraaienpoten" (Cockerels and crows' feet) and "Dossier Bakelandt" (The Bakelandt file).

ASTER BERKHOF (1920) interrupted a sequence of colloquial, handwritten stories, to give us "Het Dagboek van een Missionaris" (The diary of a missionary).



could be a missionary), a most able and deeply thought out book. As in Aster  
senior's case, it was a spiritual need which inspired "De Paap van  
Stabroek" (The rector of Stabroek) by ARMAND BONI (1909). This is the  
story of a Catholic priest who becomes a victim of the lucid objectiveness  
in which he studies the upheavels of the Reformation in Antwerp, causing  
Boni to relinquish his willingness to voice opinions or criticism.

ROSE GRONON (1901) was chiefly concerned with the sufferings of the  
human soul, reaching the summit of her art in "De Ramkoning" (The  
King of the Ram). In this she related the drama of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra  
"lived through the ancient matriarchical customs that were already  
(t) being discarded and had therefore become incomprehensible at the time  
of Agamemnon's murder which, in ancient Greece, was regarded as a  
case of treachery and martyrdom. But although Rose Gronon has a  
passion for historical topics, as in "Orso", "De Gyldenlöve Saga"  
(The Gyldenlöve Saga), "Sarabande" (Saraband) and "Ik, Hasso van Bod-  
man" (I, Hasso van Bodman) she has also explored present-day problems,  
such as "Ik wil leven" (I want to live). "Het huis aan de St.-Aldegondiskaai"  
(The house on St.-Aldegondis embankment) is a poetic story, flavoured with  
a nostalgia of youthful memories.

(1919) After a book about her father, the writer Felix Timmermans, LIA TIMMER-  
MANS (1920) published some light, bantering novels. Then in "Sabine  
Charantjes", a highly successful novel, she described the well-nigh  
omnipotent influence which a woman who has long since died, continues to  
exert over her family and friends, although she was not well loved in  
her lifetime. The firm prose of HERMAN VOS (1928), a former commando,  
who spent a few years in the Argentine, is of remarkable purity. His works  
include "De Zonen van Pepe Jimenez" (The sons of Pepe Jimenez),  
"Hans Wan kwam van de Cerro" (A man came from the Cerro) and "Het  
e diame Salvo" (The last salvo).



Lia Timmermans





Raf Van De Linde

Father RAF VAN DE LINDE (1924) is another Catholic writer. His work was "Vaarwel aan Gertrude" (Farewell to Gertrude) a naive description of a nun's adolescent crisis. But he attained far greater depth in his brave and beautiful novel about the Congo. "Die Tijd is nu Voorbij" (The time is past). This is a sincere account of the vicissitudes of a mission lost in the bush at the time the Congo became independent.

\* \* \*

This leads us to an entirely new type of novel, namely the colonial novel. Strangely enough, this only emerged as Belgium's colonialism was coming to an end.

The first of these colonial writers to emerge after the war was GODDEMAER (1916), but after his novel "Nola" he published nothing else.

African magic is the principal theme in "Het Duistere Rijk" (The Dark Kingdom) by ANDRE CLAEYS (1925). Although it was not really intended to, this intensely poetical and well written book offers an intelligent picture of the Bantu world before independence, dominated entirely by European powers. This world had been revealed to the West by Father Tembo's book "De Bantoe filosofie" (Bantu philosophy).

"En elke Dag rees weer de Zon" (And every day the sun rose) by JAN VAN DEN WEGHE (1920) is a story about the early colonial days in the Congo. The nostalgic affection of most of these authors for the subject seems to be a common characteristic of all these books. "En elke Dag rees weer de Zon" is a fascinating English-style adventure story about the wanderings and tragic decay of a small group of gold diggers, observing the



is in the prospect of wealth, in the virgin lands of central Africa. "Offer-  
eschenken van Stro" (Straw dogs as votive offerings) is another of this author's  
in novels.

"Circumstances oblige us to classify colonial novels as a specific literary  
school, but it is one which has elicited books of considerable merit and  
talented authors.

Special mention should be made of the former district commissioner,  
JEF GEERAERTS (1930), who has given us two different views of the  
dramatic events that occurred after the Congo became independent. In  
"Ik was maar een Neger" (I was only a negro) he interpreted the feelings  
of a medical orderly who is an educated and crafty African, and who  
for a short while reverts to negroid habits and becomes a war profiteer.

In "Schroot" (Scrap-iron) on the other hand he voiced the sentiments  
of former settlers who are incapable of readjusting to European standards.  
In "Het Verhaal van Matsombe" (Matsombe's tale) Africa did not figure  
as a "Zonder clan" (Without a clan), a description of uprooted man. Geeraerts  
has also produced outstanding translations of the books of Blaise Cendrars.

Hubert LAMPO



Jef Geeraerts



Novellist and essayist HUBERT LAMPO was born in Antwerp in 1920. He studied at a teachers' training college in his native city. After the war and until 1965 he worked as a journalist and became Editorial Secretary of the "Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift". He is at present Chief Inspector of Public Libraries at the Ministry of Education and Culture.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

##### **Novels**

See pages 21 and 22.

##### **Essays**

"De Jeugd als Inspiratiebron"; "De Roman van een Roman", "Marstboom", "Vaerten"; "Toen Heracles spitte en Circe spon..."; "Lode Zielens"; "Felix Timmermans"; "De Draad van Ariadne" and "De Ring van Möbius".

##### **Plays**

Dutch translation of "La grande oreille" by J.P. Breal; "Colombe" by J. Anouilh; "Meteor" by F. Dürrenmatt and "Knock" by J. Rostand.

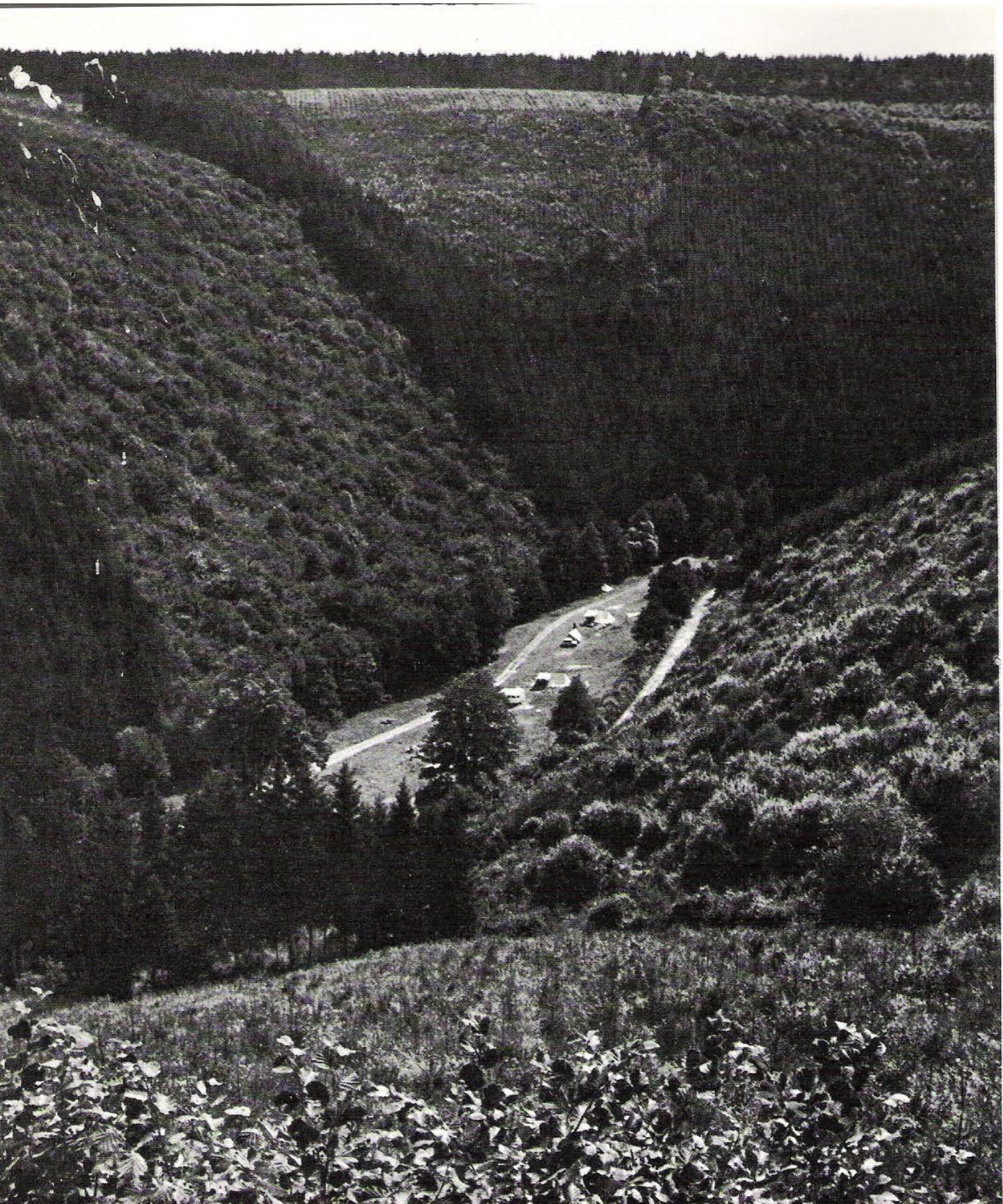


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The sea  
and the dunes  
have always been  
a source of  
inspiration to  
regional novelists







The Arz  
Francis  
wrote in  
"Poème  
terre  
homme  
I come  
night,  
I bring  
the ear  
smell  
forest



## THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL IN FRENCH

It was after the second world war that the Belgian contemporary novel in French earned a wider audience, having freed itself, not of its own characteristics, but of the inspirational themes that threatened to pin it within its own frontiers. The pioneers were Camille Lemonnier, whose book "Mâle" (Male) aroused considerable interest at a time when naturalism was still popular; Georges Eeckhoud, with "Kermesse" (Village fair); Georges Virrès, with "Bruyère ardente" (The fiery heath); Hubert Krains, with "Pain Noir" (Dark bread) and André Bailion, who still stirs our emotions with his "Vie en sabots" (Life in clogs)...

The French language writers of Belgium had to cross certain boundaries and, though describing local characters, attain a broader view of society. Some of them succeeded: particular mention must go to MARIE GEVERS (1883), who wrote some unforgettable books such as "Madame Orpha", "La comtesse des Dignes" (The countess of the dikes) and "Vie et mort d'un étang" (Life and death of a pond). She came to be known as the Selma Lagerlof of the low country between the Scheldt and the Campine heaths. She culled her inspiration from the soil, but showed such insight and affection for her characters and attained such poetic intensity that her books achieved both human and magical dimensions, which are valid for all time and for all place. Her transparently realistic work is at one with the song in her heart and the prayer in her soul: she is deeply conscious of the brotherhood of man, her approach sparkling yet ethereal



as a shooting star. This explains why her books have been so successful in France and translated into several languages.

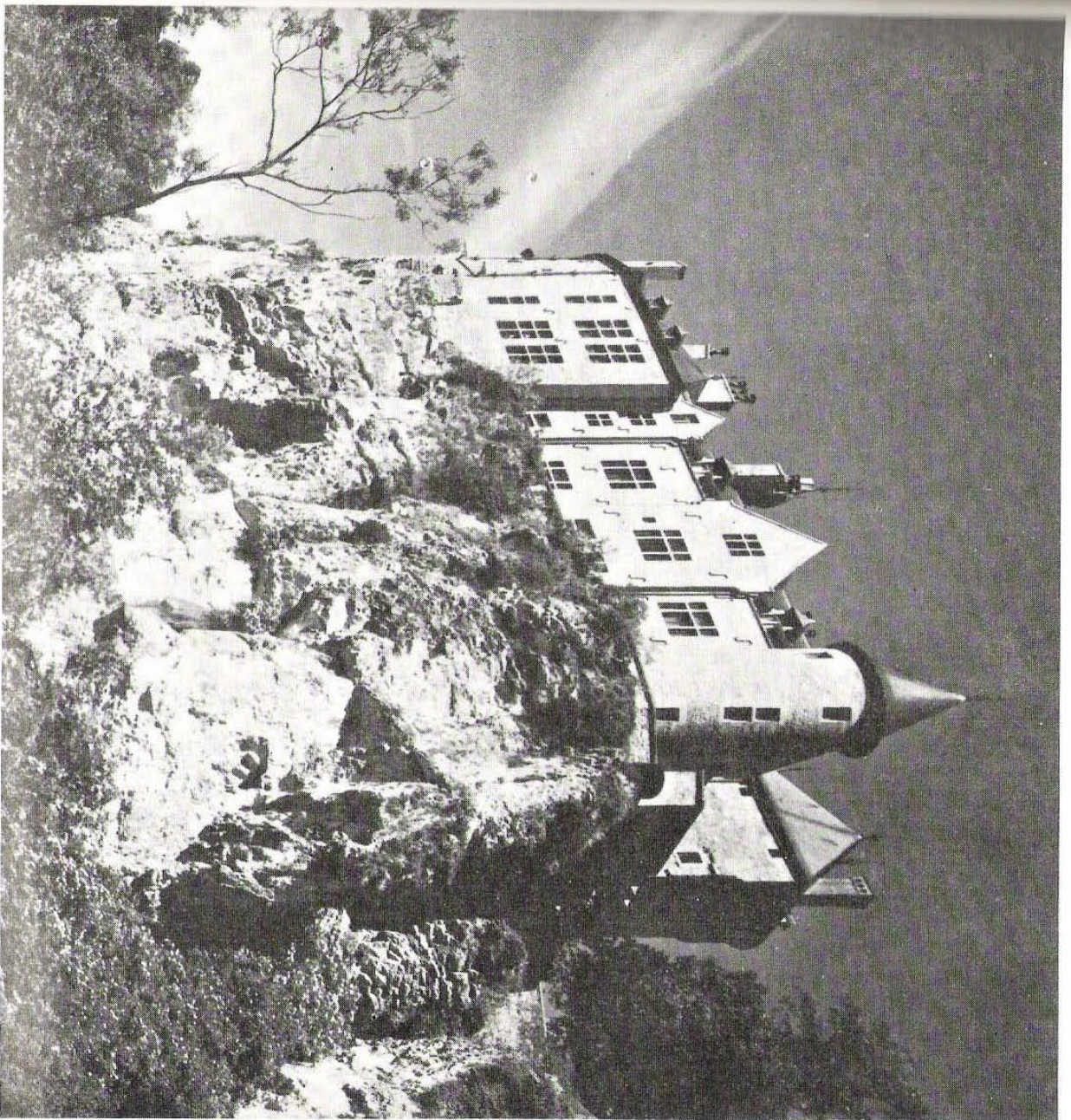
The love of nature also permeates the work of ADRIEN de PREMORÉL (1889). A keen huntsman who spent much of his time in the open and who had a close knowledge of the Ardennes fauna, fruits and flowers, his works envelop the reader in the scents and atmosphere of the forest. He was not a novelist, but he is listed here because he made the animals he described into characters of dark and mysterious tales of adventure.



Marie Gevers

It would in fact be wrong to use the term "regionalism" in a pejorative sense. For in that case novels set in Paris could also be described as regionalistic. Background after all is unimportant in any work concerned with human character. HUBERT JUIN (1926) too showed that the stature of a novel cannot be gauged by the size or importance of the setting in which they take place. This writer, close though he feels to Ramuz about whom he wrote with such insight in "Chroniques Sentimentales" (Sentimental chronicles), has not disowned his native Ardennes and has painted a poetic image of them in three novels: "Le Sanglier" (The wild boar), "La Cimenterie" (The cement pit) and "Le Chaperon Rouge" (Red Riding Hood), which have appeared under the single title "Les Hameaux" (The hamlets). Franz Hellens has said that these works "form a broad fresco of a group of human beings who, though they inhabit one part of the Walloon area and observe the particular customs of this confined society, nevertheless display universal human characteristics". He added that "Hubert Juin, who is both a humanist, psychologist and painter, has succeeded in depicting and describing universal man... and surely this is what matters." NELLY KRISTINK (1911) also located her richly poetical works "Le Beaucaron" and "Le renard à l'anneau d'or" (The fox with the golden ring) in the Ardennes... ARTHUR MASSON (1896) owed his fame to the amusing and colourful character he created in Toine Culot. But beneath





Walzin castle - in the land of deer and forest





Charles Plisnier

the humorous and localized character of these works, Masson attained deeply human feeling. But in the field of the modern novel, it was CHARLES PLISNIER (1906-1952) who gave fresh impetus to the novel as a literary work in Belgium. Like most Belgian prose-writers, he was a poet in the first place and remained one all his life. Even so, his first novel "Mariages" (Marriages) caused him to be hailed by several critics as a successor to Balzac. In this book he showed himself as he was, with his passionate fervour for living. This voluminous work tackled several problems about the relations between men and women and the various aspects of love, its greatness and its weakness, its strength but also its vulnerability. It is the story of a prominent family, torn between the absurd and destructive influence of money and the influence of love, which finds its strength and quality within itself. His characters were Fabienne—a worthy daughter of Mauriac's Thérèse Desqueyroux—and Marcelle and Christa, the latter living in a passionate turmoil.

This fine novel was among those which were in line for the annual award of the Goncourt Academy; in the end the prize went to another work, but Plisnier won the Goncourt prize the following year with his next work, "Faux-Passeports" (Counterfeit passports), a collection of short stories about revolutionaries. But the meaning of the book transcended the boundaries of its subject, one that could be applied to many different moral situations and psychological quandaries.

Charles Plisnier's characters often moved in a harsh and violent world; but he placed another fierce yet admirable demand upon them: that they should be selfless. In "Mariages" he applied this principle to matters of love, in "Faux-Passeports" to heroism, while in the trilogy entitled "Meurtres" (Murders) he described the sufferings of those who resist the pettiness of a small community which succeeds in rising in the social scale thanks to money.



lined as "the history of a family under the Third Republic". It is the soberest, most classical of all Charles Plisnier's novels: "Beauté des Laides" (The beauty of ugly women). Here the drama is not centred on society but on the conduct of the heroine, Sabine, who wages a desperate struggle against her ugliness and who suffers from a complex that was fostered partly by the way she was brought up. Though this work was very different in character to his other novels, it still reflected his fiery temperament, his spirited impetuous nature and idealism combined with a rich fund of experience.

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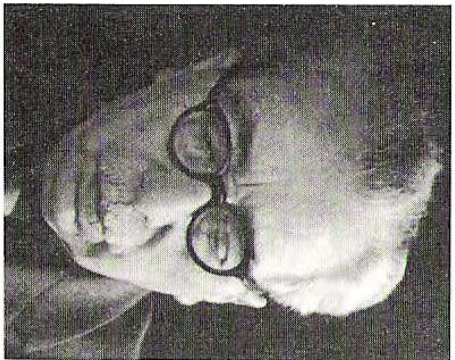
Charles Plisnier had no disciples. Belgian writers are usually too individualistic to join a school. One of Plisnier's closest friends, ALBERT AYGUESPARSE (1900) might well have been influenced by him, yet his work kept its own character. His themes reflect his concern for young people and their problems, about which he knew a lot as he was a teacher by profession. As a writer he believed that there was a special literary technique for novels: he applied it, not from outside, but by integrating it in the plot and in the psychological development of his characters. The power of his books resides in his precise, classical style, in their warmth, combined with a lucid, analytical approach, and in their contained fervour.

Novels such as "L'heure de la vérité" (The moment of truth), "Une génération pour rien" (A generation for nothing) and "Notre ombre nous précède" (Our shadows goes before us) are important books. Although the subjects are very dissimilar, they all reflect a similar view of life not only in the concrete, but in the surreal sphere which harbours the thirst for deep alliances. His work will endure as one of the truest and most important literary testimonials of this time.



A. Ayguesparse





Constant Burniaux

Few periods in literature have been as deeply marked by the painful events of the moment. To some extent, these events may be said to have submerged a number of the writers who witnessed them. CONSTANT BURNIAUX (1892) is another writer with a special interest in young people and their problems; he even tackled the delicate and tragic subject of abnormal children. He is also one of the principal novelists of his time. The most important of all his works was conceived and written in the silence of his seclusion during the second war. It is a lengthy chronicle such as those by Georges Duhamel and Roger Martin du Gard which were so successful in France. The five volumes by Constant Burniaux appeared under the general title "Temps inquiets" (Anxious years), reflecting the contents of a plot whose many ramifications extend from the year 1900 to 1946, with alternate periods of peace and war.

It was not simply the authors' intention to relate the history of this half century. What he wanted especially was to describe his characters' reactions and deepest emotions at these events. He is less interested in facts than in their profound repercussions in the mysterious recesses of the human soul, as is shown in the sub-title of the fifth volume, "La vérité est dans les cœurs" (Truth lies in the human heart). This may well be regarded as a profession of faith by a writer who combines warmth of the soul with that of the senses.

O.P. GILBERT (1898) is a particularly versatile writer, for he has been a journalist and a novelist, a poet, historian, and script-writer for the radio. What strikes us most in his books, is how he connives with his characters, whom we seem to discover in the very act of living. He has a vast bibliography, but few can doubt that "Baudouin des mines" (Baudouin of the mines) will remain his most important novel. His style is rugged and incisive. He handles human problems and concerns with the vigour of a man who has lived among the slag-heaps. Another of his books



which became very well known was "Mollenard", which was made into a film with a brilliant cast including Harry Baur, Pierre Renoir, Gabrielle Dorziat, Dalio and Albert Préjean.

A considerable proportion of French-language literature in Belgium is imbued with a realism which aims to transcend its own limitations, not as a means of escape, but in order to attain the fullest meaning of human truths. If, however, we wanted to name the author whose work is closest to reality, giving a physically accurate description of human deeds and gestures, yet also rendering their moral and psychological implications, we would mention Daniel Gillès first and foremost.

DANIEL GILLES (1917) is a precise and exacting writer. His work might be said to mirror certain aspects of society. This intelligent, erudite author is highly versatile. He is interested in business and in films, and is interviewed on television, discussing works he has written about Tolstol and Lawrence, for he is a lively and critical biographer too.

He started with imaginary tales which appeared under the title "Mort-la-Douce" (Gentle death). After this he decided to turn to novel-writing. Here he showed himself to be a sharp and sometimes cruel observer, a man of experience who knew what he was writing about. This was the case in "Jetons de présence" (Attendance fees) and also in "Le coupon 44" (Coupon 44), two very revealing books about the business world. The writer's severity is tempered with an irony which should perhaps be regarded as the "virtue of contempt" that Vercors mentioned one day. Jean Mogin has very rightly said that Daniel Gillès comes to grips with reality: "he bases his tale squarely on his own personal experience and is not afraid to call people and things by their name. And yet his work is elegant and subtle." These remarks were inspired by his novel "Etat de grâce" (State of grace).



Daniel Gillès





Louis Dubrau

Personal experience is also an important factor in the novels of LOUIS DUBRAU (1904). This is the masculine pen-name of a woman who is a poet and a constant traveller, who may always be found at crucial places all over the world. She was in the Congo and in North Africa at the most difficult moments, and she has often sought inspiration from the places she has visited during these perilous travels. But her wanderings may fairly be described as a constant search to solve the mystery of human happiness, and therefore of human suffering. "L'Autre versant" (The other slope) is a proof of this, as is "La poursuite de Sandra" (Pursuit of Sandra) which, in a very fugitive manner, explores the possibility—so uncertain in the writer's view—of a power with which we might be endowed to face up to our destiny.

She uses her feminine intuition to sustain and enrich her analyses of the heart, but she makes a masculine use of logic, wholly unpremeditated and without betraying the psychological mechanism of her characters. She is sensitive, but her sensitivity is ruled by her intelligence and especially by her keen interest in human beings, whose reasons and motives she always tries to dissect. It is this which inspired the literary technique of her latest book "Comme des gisants" (Like recumbent figures) in which each character is studied according to himself and according to the others.

\* \* \*

Like those of Louis Dubrau, the writings of PIERRE DEMEUSE (1909) are rooted in travel. Many passages in his works are inspired by visits to foreign countries, particularly Scandinavia. He is chiefly a writer of short stories, a difficult art in which he excels. His frank, direct style is a pleasure to read, but his sober realism does not rule out the finer shades, as can be fully appreciated in "La nuit londonienne" (London night). His other works include "Les visages de la nuit" (Faces in the night), and the novels



"Heures grises" (Grey hours), "Les âmes désertes" (Deserted souls) and "La fille de minuit" (Midnight girl).

CHARLES-LOUIS PARON (1914) was a press correspondent in the Middle East and later moved on to the Far East. His writing too has clearly been influenced by his travels. In a pure, demanding style, he voices the feelings of a harsh human society, his attention fixed on the people, on those who are undergoing trials and tribulations. He often shows awareness of social problems. His works include "Et puis s'en vont" (And then the puppets go away), a history of his own family, fairly critical in tone; "Marche-Avant" (Forward march), "Cette terre" (This earth) and, especially, "Les vagues peuvent mourir" (The waves may die), a novel of poignant solitude which is set in Communist China.

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GEORGES LINZE (1900), who is best known for his poems about the modern era, is also the author of several novels: "Le prophète influencé" (The prophet influenced), "Les Enfants bombardés" (The bombed children), "Sébastien ou le jeu magique" (Sebastian or the magic game), "Marthe ou l'âge d'or" (Martha or the golden age) and "Renée ou la mère héroïque" (Renée or the heroic mother).

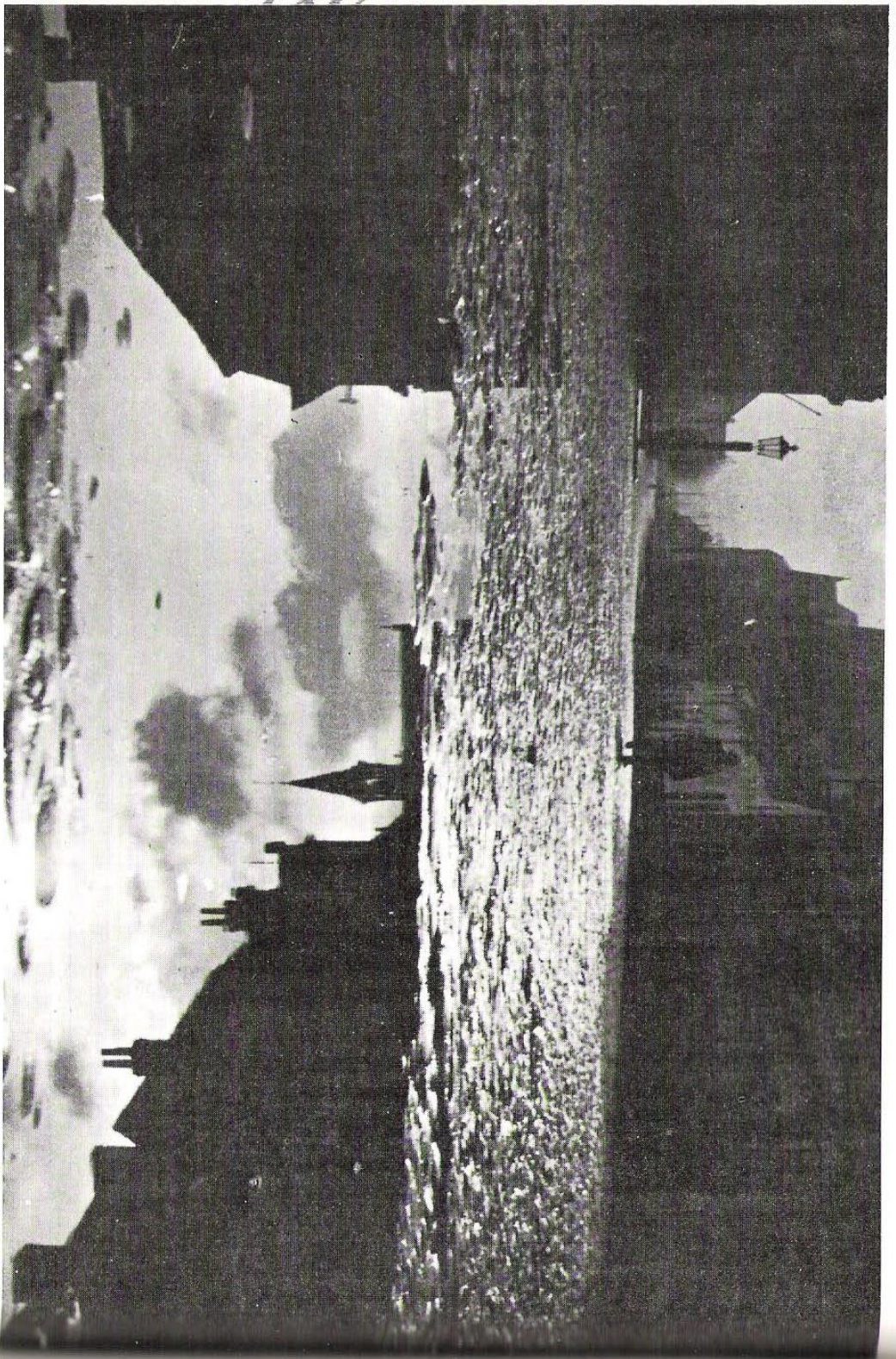
Georges Linze has a good feeling for the technique of the novel but manages even so to remain entirely free, as if it were second nature to him.

In an analysis of his works Marcel Thiry has written as follows: "They are imbued with captivating guilelessness and seem gently utopian, the very opposite of the immoderate ambition Linze exalts in his poetry. Here the characters have been simplified, stripped entirely of non-essentials, they live, love and die, quietly in a city that does not quite appear to be of this earth, and in which tender miracles occur naturally and modestly."



Charles-Louis Paron





This unusual view of a street in Ghent reflects the atmosphere of Jean Ray's works

JACQUES G  
our younger w  
quest of Prag  
"L'étang-cœur  
ashes) and "La

This author  
writing, by his  
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His works all  
which has, pe  
Proust, Linze n

CHARLES E  
writer who ac  
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Let us now j  
JEAN RAY  
believe. Even i



JACQUES GERARD LINZE (1925) is, with Jean Muno, one of the best of our younger writers. His works include "La Conquête de Prague" (The conquest of Prague), "Par le sable et par le fer" (Through sand and iron), "L'étéang-cœur" (The heart-shaped pond) "Le fruit de cendre" (Fruit of ashes) and "La fabulation" (The scenario).

This author attracted immediate attention by the transparency of his writing, by his determination fully to confront human circumstances. His work gains also from a diversity created by correlation of theme and style. His works all bear his own personal stamp and even in "La fabulation" which has, perhaps wrongly, been described as a pastiche of Marcel Proust, Linze remains true to himself.

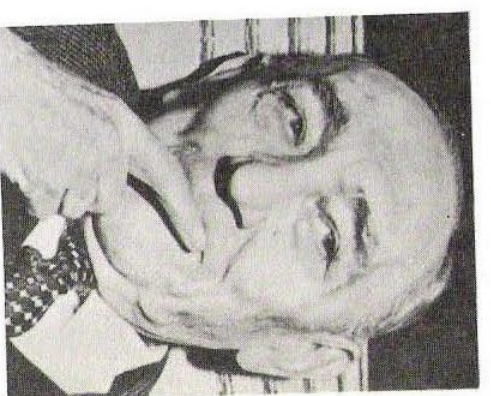
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CHARLES BERTIN (1919), the nephew of Charles Plisnier, is also a writer who achieved success early, thanks to the theatre. He is a stylish author, not because he believes in art for art's sake, as used to be the fashion, but because his taste for art is combined with a keen and subtle feeling for psychology. His style is probably the best of the moment but his sense of beauty is mingled with a sense of anxiety. His first novel, "Le journal d'un crime" (Diary of a crime), combines a detective story with a human problem, while his second novel, of late nineteenth century flavour, tells of a lovers' conflict. But the following quotation from "Journal d'un crime" applies to both these novels: "The main thing is not for innocence to be tortured but for innocence to exist."

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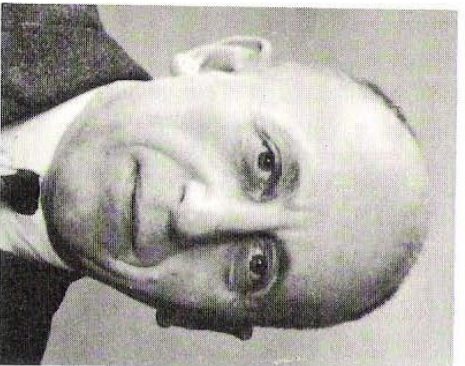
Let us now jump off into the world of fiction.

JEAN RAY (1887-1964) is unquestionably one of the masters of make-believe. Even if we are not taken in (because his tales are so fantastic) we



Jean Ray





Thomas Owen

are spell-bound by his tales of the magical, the unreal and the horror-inspiring. Perhaps we are swept along by the tone of these stories, a cold, measured tone, with alert, incisive phrases which often help to show up their morbid improbability. Whether we like this style or not, we are captivated by it.

Jean Ray used sometimes to unfold his stories in the style of the English writers and often did so successfully. But although he had a wild imagination and imbued his subjects with pulsating life, these books still lack the conspiratorial wink and morbid humour of the English authors. A lesser known work, which he refused to publish, has been issued by one of his friends. It is "Les contes noirs du golf" (The black tales of golf), a story about bewitched golf-balls which owe their magic to the human blood coagulated around the head of a dead bird, about baleful clubs, and ghosts on the golf course. It shows Jean Ray's characteristic mixture of measured style and extravagant ideas, with close involvement in a macabre and sanguinary supernatural universe.

His complete works are in the process of publication, with "Le livre des fantômes" (The book of ghosts), "Les cercles de l'épouvante" (The circles of terror), "Les contes du whisky" (Whisky tales), "Les aventures de Harry Dickson" (The adventures of Harry Dickson)...

Should THOMAS OWEN (1910) be regarded as a disciple of this author? He too is drawn by the unusual, which he describes in striking fashion. But his style is different, perhaps more subtle and also more poetical.

Thomas Owen himself has offered this explanation: "I like to temper the excesses of fantastic tales by a kind of pirouette. Morbid humour is an escape hatch for the mind. We can like fear, but it must not dominate us." It would be impossible to list all his works, which have been translated into twenty-five languages. But the best known are "L'initiative de la



peur" (The initiative of fear), "Le livre interdit" (The forbidden book),  
"Les invités de huit heures" (The eight o'clock guests). "Jeu secret"  
(Secret game), "La cave aux crapauds" (Toads' cave).

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The most illustrious of the elder novelists in Belgium is without any doubt FRANZ HELLENS (1881), whose output has not suffered in any way from advancing age. The way in which poetry influences prose in our country is particularly evident in this writer's work. Whereas it was Jean Ray and later Thomas Owen who led the field in fiction and horror stories, Franz Hellen's work is inspired far more by pure magic. When he called one of his books "Réalités fantastiques" (Fanciful reality) he was in fact giving an apt description of all his novels and short stories. It would however be a mistake to remember only the dream-like aspects of these works, for they also reflect the writer's respect for the truth, no matter how great his ability to transfigure it and surprise it beyond its surface appearance. "I am not", he has said, "what is usually described as an imaginative man. Despite anything they may say, I am wholly devoid of imagination, but I may have a gift for invention. Creating images is one thing, inventing symbols or myths and weaving adventures is another."

"Mémoires d'Elseneur" (Memories of Elsinore) is the finest example of the way in which he depicts concrete and transfigured reality, while "Entre toutes les femmes" (Among all women) shows how he reveals immediate reality. These two works can be used as yardsticks in order to classify and divide the other prose works in Franz Hellen's abundant bibliography. It is perhaps into "La femme partagée" (The divided woman), "Mélusine", and "L'homme de soixante ans" (A man aged sixty) that the author has poured the best of himself, of his memories and his experience.



Franz Hellen





Paul Dresse

HENRI DAVIGNON (1879-1964) is another older writer who has always had a deep affection for his native soil. He belongs to a prominent family that has long given the country faithful service. He might easily regard this as a cause for pride, but he prefers simplicity: "Land and titles are not the only things that matter. Every family has a moral inheritance which it has received from those who gathered it and built it up and whose issue we are". There could be no better illustration of his basic tenet than this quotation by Davignon himself.

Born on Walloon soil, Davignon has shown his affection for the whole of his native land. Although he has located some of his novels in Walloon settings—his Masures castle in Liege—he has also written "Un pénitent de Furnes" (The penitent of Veurne). He has come to know the very heart and soul of the two communities living in Belgium: by narrating their qualities he has fostered mutual understanding between them. Could one speak of regionalism in connection with Davignon's novels, from his first "Le courage d'aimer" (The courage of loving) to his latest, "Naissance d'un poète" (Birth of a poet), which is the third volume in the saga of the "Paling et Beauveau" (Paling and Beauveau) families and which constitutes such a moving tribute to human wisdom? Doubtless yes, but regionalism reflecting a very deep knowledge of human nature. It is this which explains the enduring quality of Davignon's work, while his character and personality explain the warm friendship that is so widely felt for him. There is a rare and perfect accord between what he is and what he writes. Georges Sion has drawn a very accurate picture of this delicate author who has left such interesting memoirs in "Les souvenirs d'un écrivain" (Souvenirs of a writer). About Davignon's many friendships, Sion says: "Such universal agreement is too rare to be disregarded. If we examine the reasons for this, we can list: the breadth of his work and its links with the country so faithfully described in it; the qualities of the man, who cultivates a detached form of modesty but



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Maigret and the Saint-Fiacre affair





Georges Simenon

whose wise counsel and encouragement, kindness and independence are boundless; and above all enduring youthfulness, which enables us to love his wisdom and which has kept both his eye and his mind completely fresh."

\* \* \*

With PAUL DRESSE (1901), a truly Belgian writer, we are still in the Liege area. With a scholar's patience and scrupulous care he has painted a broad fresco of life in Liege during the century of the industrial revolution. It contains some colourful descriptions of characters and events of the period, but it also shows the writer's insight into the human heart, its virtues, its passions and its weakness. Though chiefly the history of a family, it is also History as such. Several volumes have appeared under the joint title "La tradition perdue" (The lost tradition). It would be difficult and doubtless unfair to single out the best of them, but perhaps the most directly moving is the volume which is sub-titled "Les maléfices du vieux rideau" (Evil spells of an old curtain).

\* \* \*

While Franz Hellens is probably the greatest of all living Belgian novelists, the star among them is without any doubt GEORGES SIMENON (1903).

Born in Liege, Georges Simenon conquered the world with his famous Commissaire Maigret and with his entirely novel approach to the detective story. But the adventures he relates are not always out of the ordinary and cannot always be described as detective stories. Suspense is not their only nor their principal virtue. Simenon is a masterly creator of atmosphere; through his dark streets and fogs he reveals to us the



psychological make-up of characters that are very familiar to him. Devotees of the detective story may say that Simenon never manages to surprise them; but others invoke different reasons for the author's amazing success.

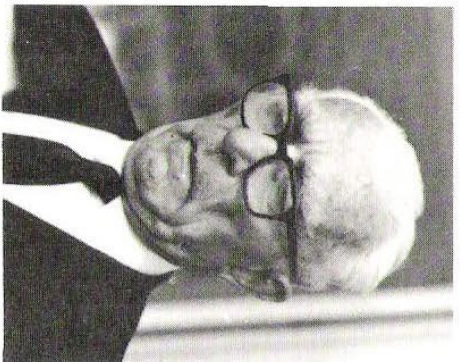
These are the reasons which have in the past few years led Simenon towards a more important type of book. Despite the undoubted qualities of his work, we had come to expect more than the stream of "Maigret" and similar works, which many people regard simply as entertainment. And Simenon has fulfilled our expectations. By his detective stories, he was able to cultivate precious qualities that have now led to "Le Fils" (The son), "Le Président" (The President) and "La Porte" (The door). The memory of Maigret is still with us, but in the background, to carry out a new kind of investigation, aimed at analysing feelings rather than facts, hearts and emotions rather than atmosphere. These works are far more revealing about the author's uncertainties and anxieties, and they are perhaps in the nature of an involuntary confession. There is no room here to analyse these veiled admissions in detail, but it is worth quoting from a recent essay by Anne Richter on the subject: "Simenon's characters are guided by one and the same instinct—the call of the road—to which they all obey sooner or later. They are migrant people, and as potential pilgrims perhaps they only feel alive from the moment they set off... Most of the time they are not satisfied with what they find at the end of their journey. They cannot accept the fact that human beings have limitations. And they feel that even if limitations exist, perhaps they are never attained. Boundaries are always left indistinct. To the question: do we know where man begins or ends, Simenon offers no answer. Tirelessly he resumes his errant quest. Farther, and farther still. One must try to live."

\* \* \*



Marie-Thérèse Bodart





Pierre Nothomb

Uncertainty, anguish over the destiny of men torn by the struggle between Good and Evil—these are things that Simenon feels and describes, but on his own scale, which is but rarely concerned with philosophical or spiritual considerations. These are however very much present in the work of MARIE-THERESE BODART (1909). Not that her works are entirely cerebral; for she is concerned too with the weight of sin and the weakness of the flesh. Her novels such as "Le Mont des Oliviers" (Mount of Olives) and "L'Autre" (The other one) are imbued with a deep sense of human tragedy. Perhaps "L'Autre" will remain Marie-Thérèse Bodart's most important novel, for it is difficult to see how much further her delicate technique could carry the dramatic intensity she achieved in this book, and which was already foreshadowed in "Les Roseaux noirs" (Black reeds) and "La Moisson des Orges" (The barley harvest), her previous works.

After the extreme mysticism of "Mont des Oliviers", "L'Autre" raises the most crucial questions a man can ask himself. In this, evil is depicted in its most subterranean forms but also in its palpable, incarnate presence. The writer shows her character accomplishing his descent into hell, until he suffers complete chaos of the senses. Night turns into such utter darkness that, to describe his feelings, a young priest ventures to say "We dare no longer believe in the presence of angels". If it were not that he took a different path than Marie-Thérèse Bodart, Bernanos could most easily be compared with her. Even so, there is enough affinity between these novels and our remembrance of Mouchette, for the author of "Sous le soleil de Satan" (Under Satan's sun) to be mentioned here.

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"Morménil", the last novel by PIERRE NOTHOMB (1887-1966), also tells of an encounter between angels and demons. It describes the temptation and downfall of the abbot of a monastery who has seduced an abbess. This

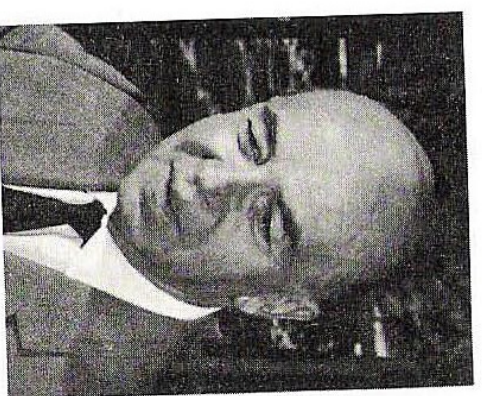


is followed by the birth at another love, which sets fire to the heart and the flesh of a nun, who is then released from her vows. This theme, combined with the aura of black magic that envelops a place which is marked by sin and is yet on the way to redemption, is treated by the author in his own grave yet ardent style and with undeniable grandeur. This is a great novel whose boldness is redeemed by its qualities of the soul.

Pierre Nothomb, one of our most fertile poets who always connected the spiritual with the temporal, is one of those whose work will endure. He had a deep love for the Gaume and Ardennes territory, and for his fine house at Pont d'Oye, set amid ponds and forests. His prose writings have remained independent of his poetry. For Nothomb was an able narrator, with a keen interest also in history and politics. This he showed in "Le Prince d'Olzheim" (The Prince of Olzheim), while "L'Egrégore" ("The new knight of the Round Table") and "Les Elie-Beaucourt" constitute a powerful transposition of some dreams taken from the great adventure of "no-man's land". Pierre Nothomb liked and wanted grandeur, without fearing excess, which he avoided because he knew the stature of man. His fervour carried him beyond himself and lended his novels their true dimension.

\* \* \*

No other Belgian novelist is more poetical in his prose writing than MARCEL THIRY (1897) who is the permanent secretary of the Royal Academy of French Language and Literature, and probably the greatest and the most individual of our poets. In his work it is poetry which conditions and lends added presence to prose. His style, which is perfectionist yet warm and human at the same time, bears the imprint of his poetic sensibility which enables him better to perceive and express the indefinable mysteries within and around us.



Marcel Thiry





“Tempo di Roma”

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While "Juste ou la quête d'Hélène" (Justus or Helen's quest), a somewhat Faustian work though linked with reality, has the resonance of a poem, "Comme si..." (As if...) touches on problems that are anchored in life, on the enigma that envelops both our actions and our omissions, and on the darkness that conceals our own motives and those of fate. His work is impregnated with vulnerability but also with greatness, with the dimension of man in his own personal drama and in the drama he shares with the rest of mankind. One vital question wells up from this book and from the hero's consciousness: which is the power capable of explaining the fate that regulates life? Whatever this power may be, does it exist? Does not everything happen as if...?

Though reluctant to use the word "exceptional" which is only too easily applied to books, I believe that it may be properly used for the work of Marcel Thiry which seems wholly devoid of weakness. It would be difficult to choose between the admirable "Nouvelles de l'impossible" (Tales of the impossible) or "Simul et autres cas" (Simul and other cases) in which we share the author's exploration into the reversibility of human actions and intentions. Everything here is significant, finely inscribed as filigree work, and perceptible because of the transparency of words and phrases that are finely chiselled though without artifice, bearing the imprint of the poet's keen and subtle mind.

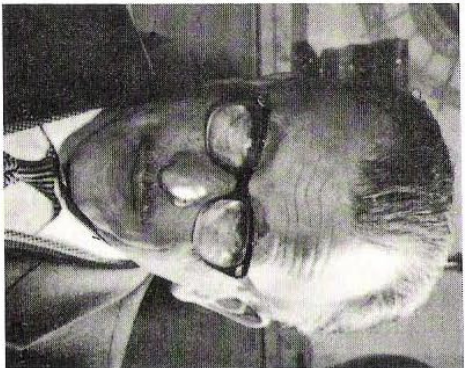
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The poet and essayist ROBERT VIVIER (1894) attracted considerable attention with his first novel "Non" (No). But when this appeared he had already published a collection of short stories inspired by the war. Not until twenty years later did he publish "Mesures pour rien" (Measures for nothing) embodying an idea that is close to his heart. In it he appears as a witness of life, which is the only justifiable stance since all is accom-



Robert Vivier





Alexis Curvers

plished outside the plot. Sentiment rather than willpower predominates in this story of a man who lives in expectation of something, and which illustrates the point that very often it is the totally unexpected which happens.

Robert Vivier's propensity for populism came to the fore in "Folle qui s'ennuie" (Boredom of a madwoman), and in "Delivrez-nous du mal" (Deliver us of evil) in which he related the history of Antoinism (Antoine was a Walloon 19th century miner who founded a religious sect). But his brand of populism is, in Marcel Thiry's words, a Vivier-populism, making no concessions to popular parlance though reproducing its character and savour. It has been said that his pure, concise style lies half-way between Baudelaire and Charles-Louis Philippe. But perhaps it is enough simply to say that it is the style of a great prose-writer who has called one of his books "Poésie est langage" (Poetry is language).

ROGER AVERMAETE (1893) is one of those fortunate writers who can successfully tackle all the literary forms. He is a playwright and historian, essayist and novelist. It is this latter aspect of his work—consisting of more than fifty volumes—which should be mentioned here.

It would perhaps be wrong to describe him as a "psychological novelist" for this would be too restrictive. He is a writer who has culled from life: "La sonate d'amour" (Sonata of love), "La légende du petit roi" (Legend of the little king), "Les hommes préfèrent les brunes" (Gentlemen prefer brunettes), "Le plus bel homme du monde..." (The best-looking man in the world...).

Roger Avermaete is also a man of ample appetites; he is of the same race as Rubens, to whom he has devoted some admirable passages. These should not be forgotten, even in a survey of the novel, because his qualities as a novelist add to his work as an historian and a scholar.



ALEXIS CURVERS (1906) is a model of discretion. This explains why, in spite of some great and lasting friendships, his books were for a long time known only to a small circle of people. There is in him something of the dilettante, and this no doubt has enhanced his freedom of mind and lent his work its characteristically refined style and sensitivity.

His first novel appeared in 1937. It was called "Bourg-le-Rond" and had been written in collaboration with JEAN HUBEAUX (1894-1959). Two years later, "Le printemps chez les ombres" (Spring among the shadows) afforded conclusive proof of his talent as a novelist: in it he circumscribed the anguish of young people in an engaging mixture of dreams and real life, joined together in subtle solidarity.

After the second world war, he produced the vastly successful "Tempo di Roma", an admirable and enchanting novel. Few books have better expressed the allure of Rome. It is a dual labour of love—love of the eternal city and love of the novel's characters. The author has provided a background of poetry and sensitivity for the principal character, a young man from the North who is also the narrator. It is a precious book in the original meaning of the word, one of the finest in Belgian literature.

The wife of Alexis Curvers, MARIE DELCOURT (1891) is also an outstanding prose-writer: her books about Antiquity have demonstrated her talent as an essayist, but she has also written some short stories which foreshadow the novelist in her.

Another exponent of fine if not allusive writing, and of style as one of the fine arts, is the novelist FRANCIS WALDER (1906), who is as discreet as Alexis Curvers, and whose novels possess an indefinable charm. His first work "Saint-Germain ou la négociation" (Saint-Germain or negotiation) wittily incorporating the author's experience of diplomacy, won the Gon-



Francis Walder





Youth is a source  
of inspiration



court Prize. His "Lettre de Voiture" (A letter from Voiture) is written as a letter from the man who was such an assiduous visitor to the Hôtel de Rambouillet, in the service of both the Orléans family and Louis XIIIth. The letter is addressed to Mademoiselle de Rambouillet. Story and style are exquisite, mid-way between the caustic and the ironical. It is this wit which makes the novel so charming and rewarding.

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I mentioned populism, in connection with Robert Vivier. But I should not omit JEAN TOUSSEUL (1890-1944) who still has a lot of faithful admirers. It would be excessive to call Tousseul a populist, for he was a benevolent, romantic writer. In the five volumes of "Clarembaux", the best work he produced, he related mainly his own character and experiences. Rather than a populist, he was a devotee of his own region and village...

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In striking contrast with Vivier's delicacy is the harsh, virulent tone of DAVID SCHEINERT (1916), whose work reflects the injuries of war. His writing is tough, realistic, often rebellious. This is fairly rare in Belgium, although this does not mean that our novels should therefore be branded as bourgeois, in the pejorative sense. Nevertheless, outrage is rarer in Belgian novels than reasonableness combined with curiosity about human sentiments—a theme so delicately handled by MARIANNE PIERSON-PIERARD (1907) and more boldly by MARIE NICOLAI (1923).

GERARD PREVOT (1922), also a poet, has published novels that deserve attention for the clarity of their style, and, in many cases, for the harshness of the content. He is an enthusiast who has made an inventory not only



Robert Goffin





France Adine

of his own actions and feelings but also of the world in which he lives and to which he addresses his observations... "La haute note jaune" (The high yellow note) should not be missed: it is a book that moves from poetry to outrage, from love to passion.

\* \* \*

A special place goes to ROBERT GOFFIN (1898), although he is a poet and essayist rather than a novelist. This bon-vivant who enjoys life to the full has written "Les routes de la gourmandise" (The paths of greed). Avidly interested in everything connected with the literature and life of great authors, he was a friend of Jean Cocteau and Blaise Cendrars. Rimbaud and Apollinaire are his favourites.

It is to Cendrars that he owes the revelation of a modern and universal poetry. In this way he found himself and his own poetry, mingled with the rhythm of jazz, of which he has written a history. He has also written about legal problems, has published a "Roman des anguilles" (Romance of the eel) and has studied the habits of rats and spiders. He can be a dazzling narrator, as in his latest novel, "Roi du Colorado" (King of Colorado), which has a lively, adventurous plot.

Adventure combined with history is the hallmark of LUCIEN MARCHAL (1893-1958), whose books "Le grand Chimu" (The great Chimu) and "Le mage du Sertao" (The wise man of Sertao) were inspired by a long stay in Brazil.

FRANCE ADINE (1890) has long been especially popular among women readers. Her books prove that lofty sentiments can make for good literature. This does not mean that she writes virtuous books for the masses. Her novels are of a high standard, and she is not afraid to



describe the passions of the heart and the flesh. In "Le Grand Saint-Jacques" (The great Saint James)—named after an inn-sign on the road to Compostella in the days of François 1st—there is no lack of violent passages.

France Adine is a believer in good style and narration. When she locates a plot in Spain or in Italy, she first studies her subject on the spot, often for months or even years. "Le maître de l'aube" (Master of the dawn) and "Panchico" are among her best books. "Le signe du griffon" (The sign of the griffon) is about Florence in Renaissance times, whilst in "Tosca Naddi" she describes the transfiguration of a human being by music. France Adine attaches great importance to the effect of art on her characters: "Art", she likes to say, "raises man above himself and, if love is involved too, can lift him very high indeed. When they commune with art, two human beings in love can understand each other beyond words."

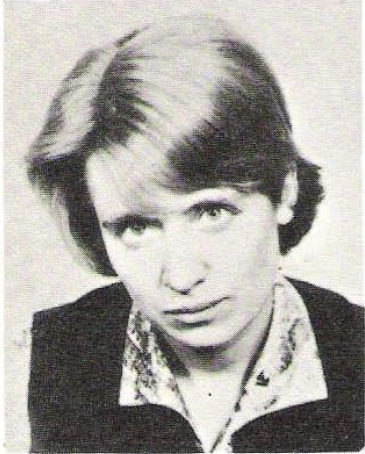
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There are many women writers of Belgian origin, several of them at the spearhead of the Belgian literary invasion of Paris. Some of them are now regarded as French, or have become French by marriage. BEATRIX BECK (1914), Goncourt Prize of 1952, is the daughter of a Belgian writer. And there was a typically Walloon dance—the cramignon—in "Barry", her first novel. She was born in France, but also lived in Belgium until she became the secretary of André Gide. Her life has not been an easy one, but she has always faced her ordeals with courage, and this has doubtless strengthened her character and added depth to her talent. She defined her conception of literature—from which she culled much of her courage—when she told André Parinaux who had asked her what she felt she represented: "The satisfaction of a taste for writing, a means of being sincere yet lying consciously... A chance also of protecting



Béatrix Beck





Françoise Mallet-Joris

yourself against certain temptations, of preserving shaded areas and of bringing back to the surface ideas, instincts and images which would otherwise lie uselessly dormant within you... »

She created her first character in "Une mort irrégulière" (An abnormal death), and she took up Barny again in "Des accommodements avec le ciel" (Compromise with heaven). This young woman is her best creation, one that was perhaps born partly of her own experience. In this last book, the writer did not shrink from scandal nor from erotic scenes. But the "compromise" smacked faintly of disturbing complexes and disappointed many readers who had entertained higher hopes for her talent. But there still remained the Barny of her first book, and then there was "Leon Morin, Prêtre" (Leon Morin, Priest), which brought her the satisfaction of winning the greatest of the Paris literary prizes.

Barny is never far away in Beatrix Beck's work: she is present also in the novel which won the Goncourt prize. Although the author may have intended it, this work is not a new version of Bernanos. It is a strong book, but contains scenes that one would rather not have found in a work by a woman writer. It is the story of a struggle in which hope conquers darkness, despite the weaknesses of the man who, with great difficulty, mumbles the first words of his first prayer: "May my prayer not seem a sacrilege to you! There is enough holiness in the world to sanctify it."

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FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORIS (1930), who is French by marriage, began her career with a book which, from a writer so young, had a fairly explosive effect. It was "Le Remplart des Béguines" (Where the Beguines live). Even so, this book showed promise of a great talent, bold yet classical. Indeed, it showed more than promise as was confirmed by the author's subsequent books: "L'Empire céleste" (Celestial empire) and then the very



different "Les Personnages" (The characters), built around the astounding Louise de la Fayette, who came to Paris from the distant provinces. Innocent as she is, she finds herself involved in the complications and dangers of court intrigue. To relate the life of this pure soul, the novelist has taken inspiration from the style of the period, yet her grave and graceful book is not in any sense artificial in character.

One may wonder if Françoise Mallet-Joris will ever rise above the quality of her finest book, which tells her own story, "Lettre à moi-même" (A letter to myself). Here we have a very young woman estimating the profits and losses of a life that can still look forward to many more years. After exploring the light and darker corners, she could—after a fashion which has enjoyed considerable success—have reached the same disappointed conclusions as Françoise Sagan; but Françoise Mallet-Joris comes to a more moral conclusion: "I love life... What I do not like is this tendency (mine as much as other people's) to drown and lose oneself in life, to make it into premature death, albeit a minor kind of death."

This novelist has related human passions and, having done so, has opted for hope. It has taken but a few years for the girl who as a child wrote her first and perhaps her only poems in a school copy-book, to become one of the best novelists of our time.

DOMINIQUE ROLIN (1913) told Denise Bourdet "I have an insatiable curiosity about human beings", and it is to this curiosity that the novelist owes the depth of her works: "Les Marais" (The Marshes), "Le Souffle" (The breath), "Le Gardien" (The guardian), "Artémis", and "Le Lit" (The bed). Her work is extensive, passionate and vibrant... Robert Kemp wrote that "she chisels her best and magnificent characters who, like those of Rodin, seem to be enveloped in a haze, like the velvety air around them". It is for "Le Souffle" that Dominique Rolin won the Femina Prize. This work ends with an unexplained act of fratricide, eliciting the comment that she has revived the gratuitous act formerly so beloved of Gide.



Dominique Rolin





Maud Frère

This idea however is not at the root of this talented writer's novels. Her books succeed thanks to the fervour of which they are born. Dominique Rolin is not afraid to tackle the most delicate carnal problems, but she uses them as a form of redemption for passion, delving out their original motives in order to retrieve some paradise lost in the mists of childhood memories. Perhaps this is the profound meaning of her work, regardless of any controversial issues it may raise...

\* \* \*

MAUD FRÈRE (1923) too has made a name in Paris. She began writing books for young people: "Vacances secrètes" (Secret holiday) which was accepted immediately by a Paris publisher who recognised her literary worth. Her next book, "L'Herbe à moi" (The grass is mine), about the uncertainties and anxiety of adolescence, was aimed at more mature readers. Her style had become stronger: it combined a rich simplicity with an artistically precious tone that was delicately allusive. Very shortly after the appearance of this second work, she confirmed her artistry in "La Délice" (Delight). Her clear, limpid style enables her to touch on delicate subjects and situations while maintaining a wholly pure emphasis and to achieve gravity without being ponderous. For there is tragedy in the heart of the heroine, haunted as she is by the memory of a rape to which she may well have consented. In turn this memory either obsesses or elates her. She has two lovers who could determine her future, but, cowardly or pitiful, neither of them fulfils the hopes and expectations which she does not voice but which lie buried in her heart.

Her latest novel, "Les jumeaux millénaires" (The millennial twins), won the Victor Rossel prize and brought her complete acceptance in the French capital. This book too is a love story, patterned on the legend of Tristan and Iseult. It tells of a young girl who has abandoned her solitude and a quietly ordered life to seek an escape that will prove without issue.



Maud Frère is a discreetly fervent novelist, as shown again by her latest work "Guido".

Born of a Flemish father and a French mother, ELISABETH TREVOL (1927) has also made a name for herself in Paris. Her style is vigorous but she has typically feminine gifts. Utterly natural, not attempting to invade masculine territory, she believes that women are less intelligent but more imaginative than men and therefore, in her own words, "more gifted as novelists."

Having lived in the "Cité Universitaire" in Paris, she took her inspiration from it and used it as the title for one of her books. It is a lively, seemingly superficial work, but the reader soon discovers a many-faceted psychology in the different portraits of youths and girls "given over to the paths of their freedom."

Her previous book is usually regarded as superior to "Cité Universitaire". This was "Mon amour" (My love), consisting of a series of letters from the heroine to her employer, who becomes her lover—but the letters are never dispatched. In them the writer shows the evolution of the heroine's sentiments, from greed to disappointment. Failure sits heavily on her shoulders, she is filled with despair and decides not to face a future in which she no longer believes. So she commits suicide.

The style is penetrating and flexible, alternately cruel and tender, with the tenderness of memory when referring to the years of childhood spent in her own country: "I pressed my country like a bunch of grapes (of which it has the shape) to drink up all the happiness it had stored up for me."

\* \* \*



Elisabeth Trevol





Estelle Goldstein

This survey is too brief for a subject that needs far more space. The author cannot complete this glimpse of the Belgian literary scene without being guilty of omissions. So many other names spring to mind. SIMONE BERSON (1894) whose beautiful style has not only given us some perfectly balanced novels, but also "*Rencontres imaginaires*" (Imaginary encounters) in which she converses with great historical figures. ESTELLE GOLDSTEIN (1902) who combines an intimate knowledge of young people with great insight into problems of love, but who is no stranger either to political and social affairs, as she showed conclusively in her novel "*Madame le Bourgmestre*" (The Mayoress). Into this novel she has poured all the things that make up life. Then there is MAX DEAUVILLE (1881) who can handle such very varied subjects and who will always be known as one of the best writers about the "other" war like MAURICE GAUCHER (1884-1957), at another level; HENRI CORNELUS (1913) whose fairy tales for children are yet solidly based in real life and who also writes novels, the best known being the one he wrote after a visit to the Congo. "*Kufa*", as well as some short stories, "*Bakongi*". JEAN MUNO (1924) whose "*L'Hipparion*" is such a happy incursion into the world of legend and mythology... FELICIEN MARCEAU (1913), living in Paris and of whom more is said in the survey of the theatre; ANDRE VILLERS (1903), CLAUDE SEIGNE (1908)... And then I must mention the beauty of the novels by STANISLAS DOTREMONT (1898) who has now turned from literature to devote his energies and idealism to peace work all over the world. It is his refined style and poet's intuition which make "*Thomas Quercy*" and "*Un amour déraisonnable*" (An unreasonable love) such excellent books. Lastly, I must also mention the poetic substance in the short stories of PAUL-ALOIS DE BOCK (1898), a writer and judge, who has also written a novel based on the life story of a revolutionary whom the author knew well. Nor should we forget YVONNE VILLETTE (1911-1968) who died prematurely and whose novel "*Les complices*" (The accomplices) is imbued with restrained greatness and emotion.



A multitude of novels have ensured the flowering of this particular literary form in Belgium. Though mostly concerned with real life, Belgian writers have also explored the paths of escapism and the treasures of poetry, though constantly remaining faithful to themselves. They prefer the rob of the inner life and of life in general to the shimmer of unusual experiences. Though rarely concerted, their books—be they poetical or realistic, conventional or revolutionary in tone—never neglect the human element and it is perhaps this which constitutes their most universal and endearing quality.

Adrien JANS





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